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THREE VERSIONS OF THE SALOME LEGEND:
FLAUBERT, WILDE AND MALLARME

by



MARGARET ELAINE GILLIES

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Three Versions of the Salome Legend: Flaubert, Wilde and Mallarme," submitted by Margaret Elaine Gillies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

The legend of the dancing princess Salomé, dates back to the first century A. D. Historically regarded as an evil, lustful temptress, the figure of Salomé changed radically in the nineteenth century, especially in France and England.

In Gustave Flaubert's much neglected short story, Hérodias, the legend is used as an allegory of the fight for Pure Art. For Oscar Wilde, Salomé served as a vehicle for the discussion of the nature of Beauty and the consequences of its pursuit. Stéphane Mallarmé's Hérodiade expresses his desire for an Absolute and explores the possibility of reaching it.

The issues raised in these three treatments of the myth were central to the aesthetic, moral and philosophical questions, not only of the individual authors but also of the artistic populace in 19th century France and England.

A shift in the thematic and stylistic treatment in these works may be seen as a natural reflection of changing aesthetic concerns.

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INTRODUCTION

Sie tanzt. Derselbe Tanz ist das,
Den einst die Tochter Herodias'
Getanzt vor dem Judenkönig Herodes.
Ihr Auge sprüht wie Blitze des Todes.¹

- Heine -

In the last two thousand years the legend of Salomé has been rendered in a wide variety of forms in many countries. Some accounts, like those of Flavius Josephus,² the gospels of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark and Saint Luke, Reimarus Secundus³ and Blaise Hospodar de Kornitz,⁴ have attempted to be historically accurate. The majority of the versions, however, are to a greater or lesser extent of an interpretative and creative nature. Whilst it is not possible to mention all the works based on the story of Salomé, some indication of the extent to which the legend has been used may be gathered by the brief catalogue which follows.

In the field of painting the most famous portrayals of Salomé are probably those of Botticelli, Titian, Pietro del Sarto, Fra Filippo Lippi, Giotto, Luini, Francesco del Cairo, Ghirlandaoi, and in more modern times: Regnault, Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau, Aubrey Beardsley, and Matisse.⁵ The bas-relief on the cathedral in Rouen which so influenced Flaubert is of uncertain origin.

Musical works on the subject are perhaps less numerous but the operas of Richard Strauss and Massenet, (libretto by Milliet and Grémont) are still widely known.

Of all the arts literature has been most affected by the ambiguous and fascinating figure of the dancing Princess. The least familiar names are probably those of Jacob-Cornelisz van Oostsanen,⁶ and Hernan Spencer⁷ (probably the most novel with his 'The Original Love Story of Salomé' in Harpers Weekly), Henri-Leopold Lévy,⁸ and Juliette Lermine Flandre.⁹ Slightly better known are Theodore Wratislaw,¹⁰ the American J. C. Heywood,¹¹ (a possible source of Wilde's Salomé), and the two English ladies who, writing under the pen-name of Michael Field, ingeniously took Nicephorus' ancient account of the icy demise of Salomé (based on one of the tortures for the damned in Dante's Inferno) to create their Dance of Death.¹² Of more importance however, are Eugenio de Castro,¹³ credited with the introduction of Symbolism into Portugal with his Salomé, J. K. Huysmans, Heine, (Salomé appears in 'Atta Troll' and 'Für die Mouche'), Gustave Flaubert, Oscar Wilde, and Stéphane Mallarmé. The figure of Salomé also appears in the twentieth century. Servadio, for example, called his notes for a new novel, Salomé.¹⁴

But the Salomé motif is most fascinating in the nineteenth century for it was here that the character of Salomé dramatically changed its personality. In contrast to the sins

of evil and lust that Salomé had represented right up to the time of the sermons of Bossuet and Fénelon, Salomé emerged in the last century as a symbol of pure Beauty, Art for Art's sake, Decadence and the Transcendental.

The volte-face was so startling that critics ever since have been speculating about its causes. In 1912 Hugo Daffner wrote Salomé - Ihre Gestalt in Geschichte und Kunst.¹⁵ In the same year an anonymous reviewer wrote an article for the Edinburgh Review called 'The House of Herod in Art and History.'¹⁶ Hedwige Drweska's well-documented but ultimately superficial, Quelques Interprétations de la légende de Salomé was presented as a thesis at Montpellier, also in 1912.¹⁷ In 1920 Cansinos-Assens studied the figure of Salomé in the works of Flaubert, Wilde, Mallarmé, de Castro, and Apollinaire.¹⁸ This study, Salomé en la Literatura, is excellent; it is from this work that H. G. Zagona seems to have derived much of the information for her book, The Legend of Salomé, (1960).¹⁹ Zagona however concentrates on linking the figure of Salomé to the Art for Art's Sake movement and is therefore somewhat limited in approach. Mariano de Vedia y Mitre on the other hand studies Las Alegorias de Salomé.²⁰

Critics, too numerous to be cited here, have written on the Salomé figures in individual authors; some studying the individual works, others attempting to establish a relationship between Salomé and various artistic and social

movements.²¹ These studies are certainly valid for Salomé was a central figure in nineteenth century art.

In France the Saint-Simonians and Utilitarians, offered the artist a functional and important role in the newly-industrialized society of Western Europe. For them, the artist was to hold the position of moral and social leader and critic. But artists of observant and sensitive natures could not long blind themselves to the mediocrity, both aesthetic and moral, of the new Bourgeoisie which tried to dictate the content and morality of art. Nor could they ignore the artistic shortcomings of those works which subordinated Art to morality or social criticism.

Théophile Gautier was one of the original and most vociferous opponents of 'utilitarian' art. His 'Préface' to Mlle de Maupin expressed precepts that were to become the foundation of a new school of thought. These tenets can be summarized as a preference for Art to Life, the Bizarre to the Mediocre, the Grotesque to the Normal, the Beautiful to the Functional and Moral, and the Ideal to the Real.

Maupin embodied in content and form all these concepts. The book had enormous impact, not only on Gautier's friend Baudelaire, for example, but on a large part of the artistic populace in France and England.²² It is impossible to read the novel without noting the shift in emphasis away from the useful and moral toward the luxurious and amoral. Huysmans, in

A Rebours, stresses the same qualities in his description of Moreau's Salomé:

. . . ni saint Matthieu, ni saint Marc, ni saint Luc,
. . . ne s'étendaient sur les charmes délirants, sur
les actives dépravations de la danseuse.

Dans l'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau . . . elle
devenait . . . la déité symbolique de l'indestructible
Luxure, la déesse de l'immortelle Hystérie, la Beauté
maudite, . . . la Bête monstrueuse, indifférente,
irresponsable, insensible, empoisonnant . . .
Prostituée de l'Apocalypse, accoutrée, comme elle, de
joyaux et de pourpre, fardée comme elle . . . 23

Both Maupin and A Rebours were, of course, considered highly immoral and subversive.

Salomé became a symbol of the moral decadence of the age. The artist in setting his creations outside the bounds of moral and social pressures alienated himself from society and, it may not be too imaginative to suggest that in the collective artistic conscience of the time, Salomé came to represent the individual against the mass and eventually the figure of the artist as social pariah. The artist sought a pure beauty that would transcend the ugliness of life: Salomé was used as an embodiment not only of Ideal Beauty but of the search for the transcendental.

Our interest in the Salomé legend stems from its importance to the aesthetic movements and artists of the nineteenth century. We have chosen to study Flaubert's Hérodias, Wilde's Salomé and Mallarmé's Hérodiade because these works reflect many of the artistic and philosophical questions of the age and because they are central to the aesthetics and

beliefs of each author. Moreover, neither Flaubert's short story, nor Wilde's play, has received the critical attention it deserves. Mallarmé's poem, on the other hand, has aroused criticism and speculation in abundance. To omit it from our study, however, would be to give an incomplete account of the legend and its uses.

Given the varying nature of the authors and their texts, our method of approach is pluralistic. Flaubert's conte in our view deals above all, by use of sustained allegory, with aesthetic problems. We have therefore used a method of cross-reference between his privately written comments on such matters and the work itself. The Salomé of Wilde, on the other hand, may be seen to reflect his personal conflicts and his attempt to come to terms with the mores of Victorian England. References to his personal life and to the attitudes of his times are, in consequence, essential to an understanding of the play. In our study of Mallarmé's Hérodiade we have concentrated on the relationship of his poem to the aesthetics and metaphysics which form the *raison d'être* of many of his other works and as revealed by his numerous critics.

This thesis is in no way meant to be a study of influences or sources. The non-chronological arrangement of Flaubert, Wilde and Mallarmé is nonetheless intended to allow for the emergence of a study in the development of the artistic concerns of these authors with particular reference to the

socio-aesthetic significance of their stylistic treatment of the Salomé/Hérodiades theme.

The body of this work consists of three separate but related essays. The conclusion will draw on the material presented in each chapter to show, if not

A certain, faultless, matchless, deathless line
Curving consummate . . .24

at least the progression towards pure Art in the literature of the century as embodied in these radically different treatments of the legend.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Heinrich Heine, Werke, (ed.) Christoph & Siegrist, Frankfurt am Main, Insel Verlag, 1968, p. 134.
- 2 Flavius Josephus, Complete Works, (trans.) Havercamp, N.Y., Bigelow, 1924.
- 3 Reimarus Secundus, Geschichte des Salomé. 3 Vols. N.P., 1907.
- 4 Blaise Hospodar de Kornitz, Salomé, Virgin or Prostitute, N.Y., Pageant Press, 1953.
- 5 Moreau was approached to illustrate Flaubert's Hérodias. Aubrey Beardsley did the drawings for Wilde's Salomé and Matisse has sketched some illustrations for Hérodiade.
- 6 Cf. Drweska's analysis of this work in Quelques Interprétations de la légende de Salomé. Montpellier, 1912.
- 7 Herman Spencer, 'The Original of Salome's love story', Harper's Weekly, LIII, Jan. 30, 1909, p. 29.
- 8 Henri Léopold Lévy, Hérodias. N.P. 1872.
- 9 Juliette Hermina Flandre, Salomé reine de Chalcis, Paris, Les Oeuvres Libres, 1924.
- 10 Theodore Wratislaw, 'To Salomé at Saint James's' in The Religion of Beauty, (ed.) Aldington, London, Heineman Ltd., 1950, p. 342.
- 11 Joseph Converse Heywood, 'Salome', U.S.A., N.P., N.D. may be a source of Wilde's Salomé as Wilde reviewed Heywood's poem.
- 12 Michael Field, 'A Dance of Death', in Aesthetes and Decadents, (ed.) Beckson, N.Y. Random House, 1966, p. 97.

- 13 Denyse Chast, 'Eugénio de Castro et Stéphane Mallarmé',
in Revue de La Litterature Comparée, 1947, pp. 243-253.
- 14 G. Servadio, Salomé, Notes for a New Novel, N. Y., Farrar,
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- 15 Hugo Daffner, Salomé - Ihre Gestalt in Geschichte und
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Edinburgh Review, 215, April 1912, p. 309.
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de Salomé, Thèse, Montpellier, 1912.
- 18 Raphaël Cansinos-Assens, Salomé en la Literatura, Madrid,
Editorial-América, 1919.
- 19 Helen Grace Zagona, The Legend of Salomé and the Principle
of Art for Art's Sake, Genève, Droz, 1960.
- 20 Mariano de Vedia y Mitre, Las Alegorias de Salomé, Buenos
Aires, El Bibliofilo, 1937.
- 21 Cf. for example Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony, London,
World Publishing Co., 1951 and Zagona, op. cit.
- 22 Charlesworth in Dark Passenger, Wisconsin, University of
Wisconsin Press, 1965 and Buckley in The Victorian Temper,
N.Y., Random House, 1951.
- 23 J. K. Huysmans, A Rebours, Paris, Fasquelle, 1955, p. 86.
- 24 Arthur O'Shaugnessy, Cited in Aesthetes and Decadents,
(ed.) Beckson, op. cit., p. xx.

CHAPTER I

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT: HÉRODIAS

L'idée de l'oeuvre comme produit a donc fait place . . . à l'idée de signe: l'oeuvre serait le signe d'un au-delà d'elle-même, la critique consiste alors à déchiffrer la signification, à en découvrir . . . le Terme caché, le signifié.¹

- R. Barthes - 1963

It is, perhaps, understandable that Hérodiad, Flaubert's last completed work, has received no significant critical attention. Because it is part of a trilogy, most critics have ignored it as an individual work and concentrated upon finding some overall pattern of significance in the Trois Contes.² Moreover, because the short stories are, in some ways less easily accessible than the longer works, critical reception of the volume, when first issued in 1877, was tepid.³ These factors have combined to form a pattern of critical approach noted by Jacques Suffel in his introduction to the 1965 Garnier-Flammarion edition of the three tales:

De nos jours, quand on aborde l'oeuvre de Gustave Flaubert, l'admiration va surtout vers ses grands monuments savamment construits. Il est bien certain qu'à côté de Madame Bovary ou de l'Education Sentimentale les Trois contes peuvent être considérés, si l'on veut, comme des ouvrages secondaires.⁴

It is, however, surprising that Hérodiad, as Robert Baldick points out, "was and still is the least admired of

the three tales."⁵ Since the publication in 1912 of Hugo Daffner's Salomé - Ihre Gestalt in Geschichte und Kunst there have been at least four major works written to establish the importance of the myth, particularly in relation to the aesthetic conflicts of the nineteenth century.⁶ Given an awareness of the centrality of the Salomé legend to the art of the period and the climactic position occupied by Hérodias in Flaubert's oeuvre, it would seem only natural to turn to this work to find Flaubert's final statement on art-- its nature and its conflicts.

It is our opinion that a proper examination of Hérodias will reveal it to be a dramatic representation of the aesthetic beliefs and conflicts of Flaubert. In order to establish this we must first briefly indicate the main points of Flaubert's aesthetics.

Flaubert's art was shaped in large part by his hatred of life. When, in 1856, he wrote to Laurent Pichat, director of the Revue de Paris:

Si vous me connaissiez davantage, vous sauriez que
j'ai la vie ordinaire en exécration.
(Corr. 4, 125, Oct. 2, 1856)⁷

he was simply reiterating one of his life-long grumbles. So much did Flaubert hate existence that he swore never to have children in order not to pass on the indignities of life:

Je me maudirais si j'étais père . . . Que toute ma
chair péricule et que je ne transmette à personne
l'embêtement et les ignominies de l'existence.
(Corr. 3, 63, Dec. 11, 1852.)

One may legitimately wonder if the ignominies were those of existence in general or of Flaubert's life in particular. His letter to Louise Colet on September 18, 1846, lends support to this speculation:

On m'a si souvent humilié que j'en suis venu . . .
à reconnaître que pour vivre tranquille il faut
calfeutrer toutes les fenêtres de peur que
l'air du monde ne vous arrive.

This attitude was one shared by many artists of the time including Mallarmé and Gautier. Like Mallarmé in 'Les Fenêtres', Gautier uses the same image of the closed window, in this case to point out the relationship between the act of shutting out life and turning toward art:

Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan
Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées,
Moi, j'ai fait Emaux et Camées.⁸

Flaubert, like Gautier, sought consolation in Art. When he was thirteen he wrote to Ernest Chevalier:

Si je n'avais dans la tête et au bout de ma plume un
rêve de France au cinquième siècle, je serais
totalement dégouté de la vie; et il n'y aurait
longtemps qu'une boule m'aurait délivré de cette
plaisanterie bouffonne qu'on appelle la vie.
(Corr. 1, 14, Aug. 29, 1846)

This was an attitude he was to hold throughout his life.

Le seul moyen de n'être pas malheureux est de
t'enfermer dans L'Art et de compter pour rien tout
le reste.

he wrote to Louise Colet in 1853. During the period of war in 1871 he confessed his unchanged sentiments in a letter to Mme Roger des Genettes:

La commune, c'est La Ligue! Pour échapper à tout cela, je me plonge en désespère dans Saint Antoine . . . (Corr. 6, 225, April 27, 1871)

Art was a means of transcending the animal nature of man and the ugliness and misery of Life. Like Wilde who said that the only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us,⁹ or like Gautier who proclaimed himself to be "de ceux pour qui le superflu est le nécessaire",¹⁰ Flaubert is of the company for whom "le superflu est le premier des besoins." (Corr. 1, 321, 1846).

Flaubert's art does not serve any specific moral or social end. It is, from a strictly utilitarian view-point superfluous; and yet for Flaubert its importance stemmed precisely from this lack of connection with social, political and moral pressures. To write a book about nothing is a way of denying the importance of the social commitment, of denying the realities that surround one. In 1853 he wrote:

Dans l'Art aussi, c'est le fanatisme de l'art qui est le sentiment artistique. La poésie n'est qu'une manière de percevoir les objets extérieurs, un organe spécial qui tamise la matière et qui, sans la changer, la transfigure.
(Corr. 3, 149, March 31, 1853)

Brombert is not slow to add the reminder: "Transfigurer la réalité, c'est une façon de la nier."¹¹

Antoine Youssef Naaman sees in Flaubert's works of contemporary life in France an expression of Flaubert's dislike of his society. This dislike is, he feels, a reaction to the nineteenth century "atmosphère de materialisme

et du bon sens ", a reaction which surely can be seen in works such as Bouvard et Pécuchet, L'Education Sentimentale, Madame Bovary and Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues. Flaubert's works of other times and places Naaman perceives as an attempt to escape:

Il se soustrait constamment à la vie présente et s'évade fréquemment dans le temps et dans l'espace.

Il ressuscite les époques disparues, les vieilles cités et les personnages historiques . . . 12

Flaubert's correspondence supports this theory. In 1871 for example, he wrote to his niece:

Je n'ai plus le courage de lire le journal. Ces continuelles horreurs me dégoûtent plus encore qu'elles m'attristent, et je me plonge dans le bon Saint Antoine. J'ai commencé ce soir la description d'un petit cimetière chrétien où les fidèles viennent pleurer les martyrs. Ce sera étrange.

(Corr. 6, 231-232, April 30, 1871)

Naaman's comment, blaming Flaubert's penchant for bygone days on a dislike of the present is accurate but incomplete. Materialism and mediocrity, for it is this that is meant by "bon sens" can be found in any age. For Flaubert the attractions of the past lie in the character of history which tends to ignore the commonplace and chronicle the marvellous. Descharmes' statement that Flaubert's:

. . . passion pour l'histoire s'explique . . . par ce fait qu'elle lui ménageait sans cesse une vision éclatante d'existences et de mondes qu'il jugeait arbitrairement supérieurs en beauté plastique à la monde moderne et à la vie présente . . . 13

seems a more adequate perception, but it is not specific

enough about the quality of the "vision éclatante" which so attracted Gustave. Flaubert's letter to Ernest Chevalier is not so vague:

I love to see men like Nero . . . like the Marquis de Sade . . . These monsters explain history for me; they are its complement, its apogee, its morality, its dessert; believe me they are the great men, they are immortal too. Nero will live as long as Vespasian, Satan as long as Jesus Christ.¹⁴

The quality of monstrosity which Flaubert attributes to these men and in whose cruelty he finds a certain greatness and beauty is one of the characteristics he finds lacking in the nineteenth century whose wars and atrocities he saw as petty and disgusting.¹⁵ Long before he saw the Breughel at Genoa in 1845, freaks and deformities entranced the young Gustave, as did tales of voluptuous cruelty. Whether this was the result of playing about in his father's dissecting room is uncertain. It is easy to see his penchant for the triste grotesque as connected with the vivid impression made upon him by the amphitheater of the Hotel Dieu. Flaubert himself supports this theory in his letter to George Sand of February 23, 1869:

Rien n'aurait dû me durcir plus que d'avoir été élevé dans un hôpital et d'avoir joué, tout enfant, dans un amphithéâtre de dissection. (Corr. 6, 11-12, 1869)

But there are two parts to a hospital, as Thibaudet points out:

l'hôpital lui-même et les fenêtres qu'a chantées Mallarmé. Flaubert les connut l'une et l'autre dès enfance, le réalisme nu d'une dalle d'amphithéâtre et l'évasion passionnée de l'âme . . . ¹⁶

In time Flaubert came to associate the two things, and to find in 'the tempestuous loveliness of Terror', 'La convoitise de l'infini'.

The presence of the grotesque in over half of Flaubert's works shows the vital part played by the element of the macabre in his conception of Beauty. In this he was akin to Poe and Baudelaire, and like them he believed that:

Viser au beau est le principal et l'atteindre si
l'on peut. (Corr. 7, 351, Oct. 4, 1876)

Given Flaubert's reaction to life it is not difficult to understand that his conception of 'le Beau' was often that of a dream, sometimes a nightmare, but always reality transfigured or history already figée, reworked even more. "Le rêve le satisfait bien plus que la réalité", as Maxime du Camp's grandmother once remarked of Flaubert.¹⁷

To convey the beauty of the dream so that it had "tout le charme du rêve avec toute la puissance du vrai";¹⁸ this was the task that Flaubert set himself. This desire naturally gave rise to his use of "le détail technique, le renseignement local, enfin le côté historique et exact des choses," (Corr. 2, 359), which he claimed to regard as secondary but which, nonetheless, earned him the unwanted title of pontif of realism. Flaubert in fact protested vehemently against this school of writing:

Ne me parlez pas du réalisme . . . J'en suis gorgé.
Quelles vides inepties! (Corr. 8, 317, Oct. 21, 1879)

saying that the creation of something realistic did not appear

to him to be the first condition of art. His priorities were of a different nature:

Je ne crois qu'à l'éternité d'une chose, c'est à celle d'Illusion qui est la vraie vérité. Toutes les autres ne sont que relatives.

(Corr. 2, p. 205, Oct. 7, 1847)

Once Flaubert had set himself the goal of approaching beauty by translating the illusion or the dream to give the force of the real he realised that "pour cela il faut s'occuper des deux éléments éternels; la poésie et le style."¹⁹ The older Flaubert grew, the more closely his conception of beauty became entwined with his preoccupation with style. In 1846 he had written:

Il n'y a pas de belles pensées sans belles formes, et réciproquement. La beauté transsude de la forme dans le monde de l'Art. (Corr. 1, 321, Sept. 18, 1846)

Reinforced in these sentiments by the vociferous statements of the Parnassians in the following years Flaubert came to regard "un effet de style" as "une chose sacrée". (Corr. 6, 437, Jan. 23, 1872) By the time he was ready to start Hérodiade in 1876 he was able to write:

Encore maintenant ce que j'aime par-dessus tout, c'est la forme pource qu'elle soit belle, et rien au-delà.

This statement, like so many others we have glanced at, seems positive and final. Flaubert's attitudes toward life, art, the macabre, beauty, illusion and reality have all been summed up in passages or lines nearly as forceful as the above. However, to build a picture of Flaubert as artist on the basis

of these pronouncements would be misleading.

J'ai des idéaux contradictoires. De là embarras,
arrêt, impuissance. (Corr. 6, 2, Jan. 1, 1869)

he confessed to George Sand.

It is our belief that Hérodias may be read thematically, symbolically, and ultimately in its stylistic effects as the story of these contradictory ideals. We would suggest that each of the four major characters in Hérodias represents an aspect of the mature and complex Gustave Flaubert.

* * * * *

Hérodias for example may be interpreted as an analogue of the artist-without-conscience-- the creator who considers only the success of the work. Born to greatness and power, (she has "dans ses veines le sang des prêtres et des rois ses aïeux"), Hérodias is determined to follow what she has perceived to be and created as her destiny regardless of the consequences to others. The retention and exercise of power are her goals.

Flaubert's longing to create came in large part from his desire for control. He disliked 'reality' and longed to transfigure it-- to recreate it in accordance with his own vision-- to become god-like-- a figure of authority and power.

L'Auteur, dans son oeuvre, doit être comme dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part . . . Que l'on sente dans tous les atomes à tous les aspects, une impassibilité cachée et infinie.

(Corr. 4, 61-62, Dec.9, 1852)

The impassible deity is neither the Hebraic God of wrath and jealousy nor the Christian God who rejoices and suffers with his people. Flaubert's desire for impassibility then, in as much as it is uncalled for by the metaphor, should be carefully examined. It seems to us that what is expressed by this wish, as well as by the desire for the more familiar god-like aspect of invisibility, is a longing for invulnerability from the hurts of the world. This hurt Flaubert confided in 1853 in a letter to his mistress, Louise Colet:

L'humanité nous hait, nous ne la servons pas et nous la haïssons, car elle nous blesse.

Humanity and life wound by being ugly and vicious, a state summed up wryly to George Sand in this phrase:

Ah! lettrés que nous sommes, l'humanité est loin de notre idéal. (Corr. 6, 138, Aug. 3, 1870)

Moreover, society demands of the artist that he place a human mission, a societal mission, before his art.

On demandait à l'Art d'être moral, à la philosophie d'être claire, à la vie d'être décente et à la Science de se ranger à la portée du peuple.
(Corr. 6, 230, April 1871)

This view, espoused by the utilitarians was not shared by the Art for Art movement or by Flaubert who cried:

O pauvre Olympe. Ils sont capable de faire sur ton sommet une plante de pommes de terre!
(Corr. 1, 321, Sept. 18, 1846)

Flaubert was not willing to suffer the hurts the world might inflict, nor to accede to the unreasonable demands the people made on his art. For him, literature, and indeed all art,

was, in the strictest sense, amoral. It existed outside the realms of morality or social intercourse. Nor was he willing to relinquish any control to sentiment:²⁰

Je me suis volontairement refusé à l'amour, au bonheur. Pourquoi? Je n'en sais rien. C'était peut-être par orgueil ou par épouvante.
(Corr. 4, 168, March 30, 1857)

Flaubert feared being hurt, feared lowering himself to the human level-- a state which he came to despise more and more-- feared being involved with the sordidness of life. He preferred to dwell in the realms of beauty.

La muse si revêche qu'elle soit, donne moins de chagrin que la femme. Je ne peux accorder l'une avec l'autre. Il faut opter. Mon choix est fait depuis longtemps. (Corr. 6, 2, Jan. 1, 1869)²⁰

Hérodiad too wants to control, to be in a position of invulnerability and power. Her loyalty is to herself and the preservation of that power. She places herself beyond the realms of morality and she, like Flaubert, will sacrifice love and marriage to her 'destiny'. Thus she has left her first husband who was "sans prétentions au pouvoir" (Hérodiad, p. 135)²¹ and married his brother, the Tetrarch.

Depuis son enfance, elle nourrissait le rêve d'un grand empire. C'était pour y atteindre que, délaissant son premier époux, elle s'était jointe à celui-là, qui l'avait dupée, pensait-elle. (H. p. 143)

Love and marriage are meaningless to Hérodiad except when they afford her some political advantage.

Her marriage to Hérode is considered adulterous by Judaic laws but neither the sanctions against adultery nor

the injunctions against murder hold any terror for the ambitious woman. Iaokanaan, by his public denunciations of her, is endangering her standing as the Tetrarch's wife, without which, "tout sera perdu!". Therefore he must be killed. The question is one of political expediency rather than morality.

In a like manner Flaubert refused moral strictures on his art, saying that there were "ni beaux, ni vilains sujets", (Corr. 2, 345, Jan. 16, 1852) and maintaining that even if:

. . . ce n'est pas décent, ce n'est pas moral, ce n'est même pas convenable, c'est tout bonnement sublime. (Corr. 2, 37, Aug. 11, 1847)

Flaubert's comment on Balzac can be applied equally well to himself, and it is evident that he felt a bond with Balzac and so many others who had been, or were in danger of being, prosecuted for immorality:

Tu me dis que Balzac devait me ressembler. J'en étais sûr. . . . Il passait pour immoral, infâme, etc. Comme si un observateur pouvait être méchant! (Corr. 7, 366, Dec. 9, 1876)

Hérodias's conception of her destiny leads her to ignore family bonds as well as those of marriage and religion. At our first encounter with her she is seen to be radiant with joy because her plot to have her brother imprisoned has succeeded. This introductory episode prefigures the central one of her betrayal of her daughter and husband. Hérodias, with an eye to the future, has had her daughter tutored in

the arts of seduction in order to be able to sell the work of art she has created-- Salomé, into a vaguely incestuous relationship. By this means she hopes to further establish her political security.

Elle avait fait instruire, loin de Macherous, Salomé, sa fille, que le Tétrarque aimerait; et l'idée était bonne. Elle en était sûre, maintenant. (H. p. 179)

In a somewhat less dramatic fashion Flaubert too showed himself capable of using the emotions evoked in others for his own ends. His correspondence relates his attendance at the burial of a friend where he carefully notes all the signs and effects of grief in order to be able to use them for Art.²²

Neither Flaubert nor Hérodiás have social or political loyalties except to their respective kingdoms; that of Art and that of Caius. Flaubert, prepared to fight for France, cautioned: "Notez que je la défends, cette pauvre République, mais je n'y crois pas." (Corr. 6, 148, Sept. 10, 1870). Hérodiás swears allegiance to Caesar but she covets the kingdom that Caesar has forbidden to anyone.

In many respects then, Hérodiás can be seen as the part of Flaubert that is the amoral artist.

* * * * *

Sans l'amour de la forme, j'eusse été peut-être un grand mystique.

Directly opposed to Flaubert's love of form and desire for control was an inclination to the mystical, represented in the 'conte' by the figure of Iaokanaan. Initially both impulses stemmed from the same source, hatred of the human race and a desire to escape, as the following passage from one of Flaubert's letters to Louise Colet makes clear:

Ce qu'il y a de sûr, c'est qu'il y a du moine [en moi]. J'ai toujours beaucoup admiré ces bons gaillards qui vivaient solitairement, soit dans l'ivrognerie ou dans le mysticisme. Cela était un joli soufflet à la race humaine, à la vie sociale, à l'utile, au bien-être commun . . . mes tendresses d'esprit sont pour les inactifs, pour les ascètes, pour les rêveurs. (Corr. 3, 397, Dec. 14, 1853)

It was in order to escape from, in order to rise above, the ugliness of the world around him, that Flaubert withdrew to Croisset, shutting himself away, denying himself the pleasures of the flesh in order to experience those of the imagination.

J'aime le vin; je ne bois pas. Je suis joueur et je n'ai jamais touché une carte. La débauche me plaît et je vis comme un moine. Je suis mystique et je ne crois à rien.
(Corr. 2, 411-412, May 8, 1852)

One can presume that John the Baptist's years of living in the desert as a recluse and hermit were also years of abnegation of the sensuous, and devotion to the mystical. As Flaubert at Croisset dedicated himself to the perfection of poetry so John must have consecrated himself to the purification of his soul and the worship of God. Later God called Iaokanaan to witness for him, and to involve himself actively in the moral and

spiritual reform of his people. A similar pressure, from the utilitarians and his own conscience, was felt by Flaubert. It is our belief that Flaubert was, in part, a mystical and moral man, deeply concerned with social problems.

The narrator's first description of the Saint is of particular importance in making the comparison between Ioakanaan and Flaubert. Hérodiás and the Tetrarch, together with Mannëi the executioner, Vitellius and his entourage of publicans, Pharisees, and priests, encircle the opening of the cave where:

Un être humain était couché par terre, sous de longs cheveux se confondant avec le poils de bête qui garnissaient son dos. Il se leva. Son front touchait à une grille horizontalement scellée; et de temps à autre, il disparaissait dans les profondeurs de son antre. (H. p. 157-158)

The implied transition from human being to animal (through longs cheveux, poils de bête, to antre) is striking. The forces of ambition, power, viciousness, greed, weakness, hate and stupidity embodied in the onlookers surrounding John, have attempted to reduce him to a state of bestiality. Flaubert's correspondence, especially from 1869 to 1871, reveals that he felt himself to be in a similar situation, that is to say, surrounded by barbarism, stupidity, materialism, etc.:

Moi, je suis écoeuré, navré par la bêtise de mes compatriotes. L'irréremédiable barbarie de l'humanité m'emplit d'une tristesse noire. (Corr. 6, 134, July 20, 1870)

It is no coincidence that Flaubert uses the word 'bêtise' rather than sottise for example. He wanted to make it clear that he referred both to stupidity and to animality. The ideals which he valued, 'le grand', 'le beau', 'le bien', and 'la justice',²³ were demolished in the events of the 1870 war and the horrors of the commune which followed. Eventually he lost all hope of the return to power of men of refinement and taste.

Je ne désespère pas de l'humanité, mais je crois que notre race est finie. . . . Quoi qu'il advienne le monde auquel j'appartenais a vécu Nous entrons dans un monde hideux, Toute élégance, même matérielle, est finie pour longtemps. On avait perdu toute notion du bien et du mal.²⁴

When John is first described he is in a similar position. His values are threatened by people who profess the same hebraic faith as he, and who, hence, are traitors. He too foresees the coming of "un monde hideux". One may hence well wonder if the saint's opening lines are not, at least partially, the expression of Flaubert's feelings toward the French in 1870:

Malheur à vous, Pharisiens et Saducéens, race de vipères, outres gonflées, cymbales retentissantes! Malheur à toi, ô peuple! et aux traîtres de Juda, aux ivrognes d'Ephraïm, à ceux qui habitent la vallée grasse, et que les vapeurs du vin font chanceler!". (H. p. 159)

Flaubert had no more respect for the French than did Ioakanaan for the Jews. "Mes compatriotes me donnent envie de vomir" he wrote to George Sand (Corr. 6, p. 142, Aug. 17, 1870). Almost biblical in tone, his pronouncement on the

French race: "Ce peuple mérite peut-être d'être châtié" (Corr. 6, 142, Aug. 17, 1870) indicates the reason for his final invective toward France: "Je voudrais sa disparition complète" (Corr. V, 197). The phrase is highly reminiscent of John's:

Qu'ils se dissipent comme l'eau qui s'écoule, comme le limace qui se fond en marchant, comme l'avorton d'une femme qui ne voit pas le soleil. (H. p. 159)

Perhaps the most striking aspect of John's speech is its poetic quality. The use of unexpected metaphor is enhanced by the measured, recurrent rhythm of the phrases and gives to the curse a quality of controlled force which in turn suggests perhaps the leashed power of God always in wait. While it is not our intention to discuss the linguistic elements of John's speech, it is important to note that it is sufficiently unlike that of the other characters in the 'conte' to set him apart as a poetic figure. Obviously not the amoral manipulating poet figure of Hérodiad, John the Baptist is the poet-priest. The dual role is a natural one for a Flaubertian character since Flaubert himself professed to regard the sentiment that invented the many religions as "le plus naturel et le plus poétique de l'humanité." (Corr. 4, 170, March 30, 1857).

Iaokanaan's double function as poet and priest is evident in most of his speech. There is, however, one passage we wish to examine more closely.

Tu as pris son coeur avec le craquement de ta chaussure. Tu hennissais comme une cavale. Tu as dressé ta couche sur les monts, pour accomplir tes sacrifices! (H. p. 161)

The paragraph is not only poetic in its use of metaphor but is rich in implications. The first sentence is a description of what has presumably already taken place between Hérodias and the Tetrarch. It is also, coming as it does from one of those "qui lisaient l'avenir dans les étoiles", a prefiguration of Hérodias' future enslavement of Hérode via Salomé who also captures Antipas by the clicking of her shoes:

Elle faisait claquer de petites pantoufles en duvet de colibiri. . . . puis elle se mit a danser. Ses pieds passaient l'un devant l'autre. (H. p. 178)

The second sentence relates Hérodias to an animal and thus, by reducing her to the level of rutting bestiality, puts her outside the bounds of the moral. This strangely makes her immoral, for whilst it is expected that animals be amoral, for a human to be so, in John's view at any rate, is an immoral position. The last description of the Tetrarch's wife is also manifold in its resonances. Ioakanaan's "Tu" denotes the contempt in which he holds the royal personage of Hérodias. One is reminded by this same sentence of the nature of Hérodias's 'sacrifices', (the killing of Hérode's conscience), and is also made to recall the parallel situation of Abraham's sacrifice of his son on the altar on the mount. The contrast between Hérodias' "couche" and Abraham's altar, and the opposition of the reasons for the sacrifices lend the last line a special strength.

John's language can now be seen to be a fusion of the poetic and the moralistic. He is the artist in service to a higher calling. It is his duty to guide, to chastise, to warn and to suffer. Hence his words are those of the ancient prophets, wrathful like Moses, when his people transgress or 'douce and harmonieuse', when he sings of the promised land.

It is the spiritual sentiment which gives rise to and governs the poetic eloquence of Iaokanaan. Surprisingly, perhaps, in view of his many protestations to the contrary, the same rule of conduct may be at times observed in Flaubert's writings. In the following Mallarméan passage for example, he subordinates genius and art, to the transcendental, the spiritual:

Au-dessus de la vie, au-dessus du bonheur, il y a quelque chose de bleu, d'incandescent, un grand ciel immuable et subtil dont les rayonnements qui nous arrivent suffisent à animer des mondes. La splendeur du génie n'est que le reflet pâle de ce Verbe Caché. (A Louise Colet 1853)

There are, in Flaubert, two warring elements, that of the amoral poet who puts Art above all else and that of the moral poet whose art is created in the service of something else. In the Conte this is represented by the conflict between Iaokanaan and Hérodias.

The crimes for which Ioakanaan so vehemently condemns Hérodias are seduction and adultery. He is unaware of, or ignores, her homicidal activities. This fact further links

Ioakanaan with Flaubert for whom adultery was almost an obsession. Continuing from his adolescent passion for the married Marie Schlesinger, this fascination remained with Flaubert throughout his life and can be seen in his works. In L'Education Sentimentale, for example, Frédéric attempts a liason with Mme Arnoux, most of whose charm lies in her inaccessibility. She is a symbol of the unattainable ideal and Frédéric, like Flaubert, is willing to spend his life in pursuit of elusive beauty. In Madame Bovary, Emma's adulterous relationships with Léon and Rodolphe are accomplished, but at considerable cost to herself and her illusions. For the artist the price of coupling with the muse is the same. He will either never attain her or in doing so, sacrifice his own morality, risking public ostracism and spiritual anguish. An early work of Flaubert's deals with the same theme and makes the relation between adultery, poetry, and immorality evident:

Il y eut dès lors pour moi, un mot qui sembla beau
entre les mots humains: l'adultère. Une douceur
plane vaguement sur lui. Une magie singulière
l'embaume . . . Le jeune homme y trouve une poésie
suprême, mêlée de malediction et de volupté.

(Novembre)

John's insistence on the adulterous nature of Hérodiad's crimes not only strengthens the identification of Flaubert and John but allows one to read the saint's condemnation of Hérodiad as a statement of the moralistic Flaubert's disapproval of the amoral poet.

John the Baptist can thus be interpreted as a symbol of the conscience, and it is this that Hérodiás must kill to maintain power and that Flaubert sometimes felt he must throttle in order to attain beauty.

* * * * *

We have seen that the characters of Hérodiás and Ioakanaan do indeed represent the warring forces of amorality and morality in the artist, and it is this conflict that we take to be the subject of the work. On the narrative level of the 'conte' the same two factors vie with each other for the domination of the Tetrarch. It is possible, therefore, to view Hérodiás and Ioakanaan as representative of differing sides of the character of Herod.

This 'Jekyll and Hyde' technique was not uncommon in the literature of the nineteenth century and its use has been continued to the present day. Lord Henry, Dorian, and Basil are, for example, three aspects of the soul of the artist.²⁵ Poe's two William Wilsons, Dickens' Samivel and Samuel, and Golding's Ralph and Jack may be seen as further examples of this use of separate characters to express the conflicting parts of the whole.

In Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher as well as in Huysmans' A Rebours another technique is employed which we also find in use in Hérodiás. The method in question is the recounting of a series of events which are later seen to be

mental rather than actual. The 'situation' and 'events' of the 'conte' are, we feel, an allegory for the internal struggle of the Tetrarch and of Flaubert. The happenings in the citadel are the events taking place within the mind of Hérode, and on the more extended level, of Flaubert.

The physical situation of the citadel is the first thing described in the 'conte'. The details of its situation lend much support to our theory, especially as they differ significantly from the account of Flavius Josephus, from whom, as Hédwige Drweska so correctly points out, Flaubert took many of the details for his story.²⁶ This is Flaubert's version:

La citadelle de Machaerous se dressait à l'orient de la mer Morte, sur un pic de basalte ayant la forme d'un cône. Quatre vallées profondes l'entouraient, deux vers les flancs, une en face, la quatrième au-delà.²⁷ (H. p. 133)

Flaubert's penchant for describing the home of the muse in Olympian terms is here given physical actualization. The base of the citadel is surrounded by the houses of the populace, in respect to which the artist holds an elevated position. Not completely impregnable, however, the fortress is open to external political, moral and social pressures "par un chemin en zigzag tailladant le rocher". It is by this route that Vitellius, representing political pressures, Phanuel, representing moral pressures, and the villagers, representing social pressures gain access to the citadel.

The four valleys surrounding the fortress may have a parallel significance. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Flaubert uses a similar image in his discussion of the place of Art in society:

Connaissez-vous dans ce Paris, qui est si grand,
une seule maison où l'on parle de littérature? Et
quand elle se trouve abordée incidemment, c'est tou-
jours par ses côtés subalternes et extérieures, la
question de succès, de moralité, d'utilité, d'apropos,
etc. . . . (Corr. 6, 115, May 1870)

Surrounding the castle, the "deux vers les flancs" may be viewed as the dual abysses into which the poet may fall-- social and moral. "L'une en face", may be the stronger one of political exigency and the fourth, 'au-delà'-- Death. The above interpretation is of course tentative. It is equally possible to view the valleys as the safeguards against the aforementioned evils. It is however certain that if one pieces together the geographical location of the Dead Sea and Jericho, on Hérode's right as he surveys his domain, and the information Flaubert includes about the position of the citadel in relation to the rising sun, the valley 'au-delà' cannot be associated with anything but the sea of death. This is more significant given that Flaubert chose to use the modern, instead of the ancient, name of the sea, though elsewhere, in his naming of John as Iaokanaan and his enumeration of the stars and constellations he sticks closely to the traditional nommers. Moreover, Flavius Josephus, from whom Flaubert derived many of his details, uses a totally

dissimilar name.

The towers of the citadel walls are linked by a simile to "fleurons", beautiful sculptured ornaments, a detail which seems to further establish the fortress as a palace of beauty, the home of the artist. Drweska, although she does not see, or at least does not mention perceiving, any significance in this detail also emphasizes its singularity:

Il [Flaubert] a bati le château, sa cour, la citadelle avec des pierres de Flavius, mais sur ses pierres il a fait pousser des fleurs. Au lieu de voir surgir devant nous une masse lourde et de sentir écrasé par son poids, nous voyons les murailles de la forteresse ornées d'angles nombreux de créneaux, de tours qui faisait comme des fleurons à cette couronne de pierres, suspendue au-dessus de l'abîme.²⁸

Drweska's comments on this detail and the ones that follow concerning the palace inside the fortress, further argue the point, albeit unintentionally, that Flaubert wanted the citadel to be perceived as a home of beauty.

Remarquons comment l'artiste utilise sa documentation: il ne peut pas planter des fleurs sur cette couronne de pierres, puisqu'il a affaire à un bâtiment; il orne donc d'un motif architectural: . . . il anime la description en élaboration les matériaux de Flavius: il orne le palais de portiques, d'une terrasse que fermait une balustrade en bois de sycamore, où des mâts étaient disposés pour tendre un velarium . . .²⁹

Drweska sees the last detail as the artist's way of introducing the presence of human beings to the scene and of inducting the reader into the life of the chateau. 'Velarium' however is defined as a:

grand voile que les Romains étendaient au-dessus des théâtres et amphithéâtres, lesquels étaient construits à ciel ouvert. (Quillet Flammarion 1957)

The citadel is once again endowed with the attributes of a palace of art and is now linked more specifically to a theater. In view of this remark and the detail of the presence within the citadel of "un palais orné" one is inevitably reminded not only of Tennyson's 'Palace of Art' but also of Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher and the haunted palace contained within. The house in Poe's story has often been read as a symbol of the mind of Roderick, an aesthete and poet, much as the many chambered Fontenay of A Rebours may be viewed as an analogue of the strange and complex mind of Des Esseintes. The poem, 'The Haunted Palace', which Poe uses in Usher (1839) reinforces the idea of the edifice as a Palace of the Mind. This is the first verse:

In the greenest of our valleys,
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace--
Radiant palace-- reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion--
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair.

One hardly need emphasize the similarity of details: the valley, the pinion, the palace as the home of monarch and thought.

The nature of Flaubert's text is such as to give support to our interpretation of the citadel as another palace of the mind, with Hérodiade and Iakobean as the warring

factors within. It seems to us significant that the text both opens and closes with a view of the Tetrarch alone in meditation; Hérodias and the saint exercising their respective influences within these boundaries.

Moreover the opening scene, in which Flaubert, (using a method that might well be described as ratio obliqua rather than his more famous technique of oratio obliqua) describes the landscape through the eyes of Hérode, lends further credibility to our hypothesis. The purport of the passage in brief is as follows: Hérode is on the balcony of the fortress watching the daybreak. At first he can only discern the mountain peaks but as the light becomes stronger his gaze penetrates the deeper regions of the earth. He views with alarm the enemy Arab camp and scanning the roads for signs of help finds them empty. Suddenly a voice, distant, "comme échappée des profondeurs de la terre, fit pâlir le Tétrarque."

The passage, in our opinion, is a graphic representation of the following progression: the Tetrarch first observes the things without (the mountain tops etc.). Next his thoughts turn to the personal (the memory of his present marriage is thrust upon him by the sight of the Arabs who have come to punish his union with Hérodias). And finally the observation becomes internal. It is the voice of Ioakanaan, the voice of his conscience, that rises from the depths of the citadel of his mind. Vox clamantis in deserto.

Immediately thereupon Flaubert redescribes the same landscape, again as perceived by the Tetrarch. A contrast of the depiction of like-elements in the two passages leads inevitably to the conclusion that Hérode's perception has shifted from a physical to a non-physical level.

In his initial survey the Tetrarch observes that:

Les montagnes, immédiatement sous lui, commençaient à découvrir leurs crêtes, pendant que leur masse, jusqu'au fond des abîmes, était encore dans l'ombre.
(H. p. 134)

In a subsequent passage however:

Tous ces monts autour de lui . . . les gouffres noirs sur le flanc des falaises, . . . la profondeur des abîmes le troublaient, . . . (H. p. 138)

In a similar change, the dawn, originally described in the following terms:

L'aube qui se levait derrière Machaerous épanchait une rougeur. Elle illumina bientôt les sables . . .
(H. p. 134)

is later seen as "l'éclat violent du jour." (H. p. 138)

A third example of the shift in mood may be observed in the depiction of the desert which at first induces in Hérode an almost fanciful mood:

Cependant le Jourdain coulait sur la plaine aride. Toute blanche, elle éblouissait comme une nappe de neige. (H. p. 134)

The same sight after the intervention of the voice of the conscience produces in the Tetrarch a vastly different reaction:

. . . une désolation l'envahissait au spectacle du désert . . . (H. p. 138)

Antipas is no longer seeing the natural landmarks of nature but instead perceives, in the world about him, the "marques d'une colère immortelle" (which) "effrayaient sa pensée et il restait les deux coudes sur la balustrade, les yeux fixes et les temps dans les mains." The conclusion that his later thoughts are of a moral nature is argued by the word "immortelle" which implies a divinity and therefore a moral schema.

It is interesting to note that Flaubert is consistent in his use of the physical attitude described above to depict moral or mental anguish. In the final scene of the 'conte':

Les convives partirent; et il ne resta plus dans la salle qu'Antipas, les mains contres ses tempes et regardant toujours la tête coupée . . . (H. p. 183)

Another recurring gesture acquires a specific and significant meaning in relation to the Tetrarch's moral struggle. When, for example, he hears the voice of the saint, he calls the executioner "en claquant dans ses mains" and warns him:

Garde-le! garde-le. Et ne laisse entrer personne! Ferme bien la porte! Couvre la fosse! On ne doit pas même soupçonner qu'il vit! (H. p. 137)

It is with the "claquement" "de petites pantoufles en duvet de colibiri" that Salomé subjugates Hérode's moral qualms and with a further "claquement de doigts" that Hérodiad summons her daughter to instruct her in the completion of the task which will result in the beheading of the Saint and the

annihilation of morality in Hérode. It is our conviction that the two recurrent gestures just discussed argue strongly for our contention that Hérodiás and Iaokanaan represent the warring forces of evil and good in Hérode. Flaubert's use of light and dark symbols further supports this theory. Inward perception is a non-physical process. It involves peering into the dark recesses of the mind and soul. Not only are the head and eyes, the windows of perception, stressed in the Tetrarch's physical attitudes at beginning and end of the story, but all of his confrontations with his conscience take place in the dark or semi-dark. John the Baptist's voice comes to him, invisible, from the depths of the earth, and Hérode peers into the "gouffres noirs", the "abîmes", the dark "profondeurs" of his soul. Phanuel, an agent of God and morality, goes with Hérode "dans un appartement obscur" to tell him that the death of some great man is written in the night skies. Iaokanaan's moral diatribe, which makes the ruler want to die, comes up from the dark cave in the base of the citadel, and finally, when Hérode is left alone with the severed head, "les flambeaux s'éteignaient."

Hérodiás on the other hand is described in terms of light and physical things. Our first knowledge of her, contrasting dramatically with the Tetrarch's state of moral angst, is an awareness of the disturbing presence of sensual things.

. . . il restait les deux coudes sur la balustrade les yeux fixes et les temps dans les mains. Quelqu'un l'avait touché. Il se retourna. Hérodiade était devant lui.

Une simarre de pourpre légère l'enveloppait jusqu'aux sandales . . . une tresse de ses cheveux noirs lui tombait sur un bras . . . ses narines, trop remontées, palpitaient . . . (H. p. 138-139)

It is daylight when Hérodiade confronts Hérode and daylight is the time of realities. Hérodiade immediately confronts the Tetrarch with some pretty gruesome ones: her plot to have her brother imprisoned, the reminder of the husband and child she has (supposedly) deserted, her seduction of Eutyches for political ends. Hérode, comforted by thoughts of political security, finds her "atrocious" intention justifiable. Immoral conduct does not bother him.

Ces meurtres étaient une conséquence des choses, une fatalité des maisons royales. Dans celle d'Hérode on les comptait plus. (H. p. 139)

All the descriptions of the Tetrarch's wife are couched in terms of light and gold, physical ornamentation reminiscent of the Parnassian sublime. Her rooms for example, are filled with the marks of the artificial and the beautiful:

Quand il entra dans sa chambre, du cinnamome fumait sur une vasque de porphyre, et des poudres, des onguents, des étoffes pareilles à des nuages, des broderies plus légères que des plumes, étaient dispersées. (H. p. 165)

It is the hideous moral reality behind the artifice that Iakob is interested in unmasking and this is why his description of her punishment is a detailed account of the stripping of her physical embellishments:

Le seigneur arrachera tes pendants d'oreilles, tes robes de pourpre, tes voiles de lin, les anneaux de tes bras, les bagues de tes pieds, et les petits croissants d'or qui tremblent sur ton front, tes miroirs d'argent . . . (H. p. 161)

Then, and only then will the baseness of her nature emerge and she will "crève comme une chienne!" The instrument of Hérodiad's power, Salomé is also described in terms of light and sensual beauty:

Les brillants de ses oreilles sautaient l'étoffe de son dos chatoyait; de ses bras, de ses pieds, de ses vêtements jaillissaient d'invisibles étincelles qui enflammaient les hommes. (H. p. 179)

One is reminded of the dual feeling of attraction and repulsion found constantly in Flaubert when confronted with amoral beauty. "La débauche me plaît et je vis comme un moine." (Corr. 2, 411-412, May 8, 1852). The tension between the two forces in the Tetrarch and in Flaubert cannot be resolved by compromise.³⁰ "Iakanaan l'empêchait de vivre". One or the other must go and the Tetrarch must choose.

Hérode confesses his attraction to the moral:

Sa puissance est forte. Malgré moi, je l'aime!

but he fears Hérodiad, Mannaëi and the unknown. Hérodiad wins, and Hérode is left alone, the tears streaming down his face. The moral part of him, represented by Iakanaan has been killed by his own command.

* * * * *

Hérode does not choose to opt for immorality but rather he chooses to pursue beauty at any price. On the simple dramatic level this is represented by Salomé's dance and the Tetrarch's response:

Elle tournait toujours; les tympanons sonnaient à éclater, la foule hurlait. Mais le Tétrarque criait plus fort: Viens! Viens! Tu auras . . . la moitié de mon royaume! (H. p. 180)

Salomé's dance is a work of monstrous and exotic beauty, it sweeps aside and renders irrelevant all political, cultural, religious and moral differences:

. . . Les nomades habitués à l'abstinence, les soldats de Rome experts en débauches, les avares publicains, les vieux prêtres aigris par les disputes, tous, dilatant leurs narines, palpitaient de convoitise. (H. p. 179)

But it is clear from the text that Salomé means more than physical attractiveness to the Tetrarch. Her beauty represents an elusive ideal. Flaubert does not only paint for the reader the material details of Salomé's appearance but he uses the same physical description to indicate the transcendent nature of the beauty she symbolizes. The following passage is demonstrative of the transition from the physical to the metaphysical. It is also a perfect example of Flaubert's adherence to his own maxim:

La Réalité, selon moi, ne doit être qu'un tremplin de tenir [1]'âme dans une région haute.³¹

Un carré de soie gorge-de-pigeon, en couvrant les épaules, tenait aux reins par une ceinture d'orfèvrerie. Ses caleçons noirs étaient semés de mandragores, et d'une manière indolente elle faisait claquer de petites pantoufles en duvet de colibri. (. . .) ses pieds passaient l'un devant l'autre, au rythme de la flûte et d'une paire de crotales. Les bras arrondis appelaient quelqu'un, qui s'enfuyait toujours. Elle le poursuivait, plus légère qu'un papillon, comme une Psyché curieuse, comme une âme vagabonde et semblait prête à s'envoler. (H. p. 178)

Salomé's body is first described in terms of its apparel, with only the suggestion of the shoulders beneath. We hear the slapping of her slippers before we see her moving feet; her arms before we realize their call. Salomé is calling someone who is spoken of as if they existed. This is not the case, and we have now passed from the appearance of the physical, through the suggestion of an underlying presence to something completely beyond the physical, yet only comprehensible through its physical suggestion. A similar but more nuanced transition occurs in the same passage.

We would suggest that the isolation and juxtaposition of the following words from the above passage provides an insight into Flaubert's techniques and the measure of his skill:

gorge-de-pigeon; duvet de colibri; s'enfuyait; poursuivait; papillon; Psyché; âme; s'envoler.

Inherent in the colour of Salomé's shoulder cloth, dove gray, is the suggestion of a bird. This image is taken up by the detail of the material of her slippers, hummingbird's

down. This reinforcement of the bird image makes it stronger while at the same time the bird has become more delicate and exotic. The image of flight is a natural one in the circumstances. Salomé calls someone who "s'enfuyait toujours". Ever more ephemeral in its terms the bird becomes "plus légère qu'un papillon" and finally is transformed into the winged non-reality Psyche. The significance of this double-pronged figure must not be ignored. Salomé has become a creature of the mind. The final transition to the wandering soul keeps the image of flight, reinforced by the last phrase, ("et semblait prête à s'envolver"), while shifting the emphasis to the non-physical realm now represented by the dance-- that of the soul.

In terms of the dramatic recital Salomé triumphs over Hérode. In allegorical terms beauty proves stronger than morality. But there is still a larger issue at stake. Salomé's dance is a composition "en abyme", a microcosm of a larger conflict which engaged the minds of a whole generation of writers and readers, the conflict between art and morality.

In his third Projet De Preface Pour Les Fleurs Du Mal Baudelaire explained why the artist should not explicate his poems:

Montre-t-on au public affolé aujourd'hui, indifférent demain, le mécanisme des trucs? Lui explique-t-on les retouches et les variantes improvisées aux répétitions et jusqu'à quelle dose l'instinct et la sincérité sont mêlés aux rubriques et au charlatanisme indispensables dans l'amalgame de l'oeuvre? Lui révèle-t-on toutes les loques, les fards, les poulies, les barbouilles, bref toutes les horreurs qui composent le sanctuaire de l'art?³²

This is precisely what Flaubert has done. We have seen the ingredients of Hérodiad's artifice in her room, and on the body of Salomé. But what is more, we have seen the ruthless, scheming, amoral influences that have created the work of beauty and still we succumb. The guests, the Tetrarch and the reader,-- all by their reactions have gone beyond the moral pale and willingly or unwillingly have lent support to Flaubert's theory of Art.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Roland Barthes, 'Sur Racine' in Explications, (ed.) Howarth and Walton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. XXIX.
- 2 Edouard Maynail, for example, in his introduction to the Garnier Frères edition of the Trois Contes in 1961, finds that Un Coeur Simple is fiction, Saint Julien legend, and Hérodiade fact. Others have studied the tales as second versions of the longer works. In this sort of study Un Coeur Simple is usually compared to Mme Bovary, Saint Julien to La Tentation and Hérodiade to Salammbo.
- 3 Edouard Maynail gives some excellent examples of the critical reception given the volume in his introduction, c.f. note 2.
- 4 Jacques Suffel, 'Introduction' to the Trois Contes, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1965, p. 24.
- 5 Robert Baldick, 'Introduction' to the Penguin Classics' Three Tales, 1961, p. 14.
- 6 See for example, Cansinos-Assens' Salomé en la Literatura, Zagana's The Legend of Salomé, Vedia y Mitre's Las Alegorias de Salomé, and Hédwige Drweska's Quelques Interprétations de la légende de Salomé.
- 7 Flaubert, Correspondance, Paris, Conard, 1926.
- 8 Théophile Gautier, 'Préface' to Emaux et Camées, Geneva, Droz. (Textes Littéraires Français), 1947.
- 9 Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray, in Works, (ed.) G. Maine, London, Collins, 1957.
- 10 Théophile Gautier, 'Préface' to Mlle Maupin. Paris, Droz, 1946, p. 32.
- 11 Victor Brombert, Flaubert par lui-même, Ecrivains de toujours, Editions de Seuil, 1971, p. 7.

¹² Antoine Youssef Naaman, Les debuts de Gustave Flaubert et sa technique de la description, Paris, Nizet, 1962, p. 172.

¹³ René Descharmes, Flaubert, Sa Vie, son caractère et ses idées, avant 1857, Paris, Ferroud, 1909, p. 36.

¹⁴ Cf. also Flaubert, Intimate Notebook 1840-41, ed. Steegmuller, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1967, p. 24.

¹⁵ Cf. Corr. 6, pp. 142-224.

¹⁶ Thibaudet, Gustave Flaubert, sa vie, ses romans, son style, Paris, Plon, 1922, p. 3.

¹⁷ Maxime du Camp. Souvenirs littéraires, Paris, Hachette, 1882-83, p. 171.

¹⁸ Flaubert, Mémoires d'un Fou. Lausanne, Editions rencontre, 1964.

¹⁹ Cited Brombert, The Novels of Flaubert, Princeton, N.J., P. U. P. 1966, p. 96.

²⁰ Flaubert separated from Louise Colet when she became too demanding. cf. Corr. I, 252 and Corr. I, 201.

²¹ Flaubert, Hérodias, in Trois Contes, (ed.) Jacques Suffel, Paris Garnier-Flammarion, 1965, hereafter referred to in this text as (H. p. x).

²² Flaubert, Corr. 2, 469 July 1852, as cited by Starkie in Flaubert, The Making of the Master, Penguin, 1971, p. 360.

²³ Flaubert, Corr. 7, 320, July 25, 1876 and Corr. 6, 347, Jan. 28, 1872.

²⁴ Flaubert, Corr. 6, 180, Oct. 28, 1870; 6, 163, Oct. 5, 1870; 6, 178, Oct. 28, 1870; 6, 229, April 1871.

²⁵ Charlesworth refers to this in Dark Passages, University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

²⁶ Drweska, Quelques Interprétations de la légende de Salomé, Montpellier, 1912.

27 This is Flavius Josephus' version as cited by Drweska:

Le chasteau de Macherou estoit basti sur une haute montagne, toute pleine de rochers qui le rendoient comme imprenable: et la nature pour en augmenter encore la force l'environnoit de tous costez par des vallées d'une profondeur incroyable et très difficile à passer. Celle qui est du costé de l'occident a soixante stades de longueur et se termine au lac Asphaltide, et la hauteur du chasteau paroissoit merveilleuse de ce costé-là. Les vallées qui l'enfermoient du costé du septentrion et du midy ne sont pas moins grandes que les autres ny plus faciles à passer, et celle qui regarde l'orient dont la profondeur est de cont coudées finit à la montagne qui estoit opposée à ce chasteau. (p. 99)

28 Drweska, op. cit., loc. cit.

29 Drweska, op. cit., loc. cit.

30 Hérode tries this by attempting to shift the responsibility for Iaokanaan to Vitellius and then saying to Phanuel "Ce n'est pas ma faute," but it doesn't work. The responsibility is placed back on Hérode.

31 This version is Brombert's and probably refers to Flaubert's letter to Tourgueneff, Nov. 8, 1877, Corr. 7, 359.

32 Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du mal, (ed.) Adam, Paris, Garnier Frères. 1961, p. 251.

CHAPTER II

OSCAR WILDE: SALOMÉ

Tu marches sur des morts, Beauté, dont tu te moques;
De tes bijoux l'Horreur n'est pas le moins charmant,
Et le Meurtre, parmi tes plus chères breloques,
Sur ton ventre orgueilleux danse amoureusement.

- Baudelaire, 'Hymne à La Beauté' -

In the previous chapter we have used Flaubert's privately written comments on art, published in his Juvenilia and Correspondance, to illuminate Hérodias. The question of the relationship between author and work becomes much more speculative when one refers to the connection of the author's private persona to the work. Nonetheless few would contend that such a link does not exist. In the case of Oscar Wilde's Salomé we deem such cross references essential for a full understanding of the play, for Wilde's personal conflicts regarding morality, metaphysics, and aesthetics are central to the thematic structure of the play.

Some critics, such as Wilfred M. Leadman, a writer for the Westminster Review, disagree. In August of 1906 he wrote this of Wilde:

Some men do, indeed, project their own personalities into their books, in spite of Wilde's splendid dictum: "To reveal art and to conceal the artist is the true aim of art. The artist can express

everything." But one may be confident that the author of Dorian Gray has been guilty of no such literary soul-dissecting.¹

Mr. Leadman's dislike of the auto-biographical work finds more recent critical support in Professor Tolkein. In the forward to The Lord of The Rings Professor Tolkein rejects not only the idea that his book has "any inner meaning or 'message'", that it is topical or allegorical, but also that the relation of an author's experiences to his works can be consistently and correctly deduced by any reader since he or she must rely for his or her guess on "evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous."²

Critical opinion on this point is divided, becoming especially divergent amongst biographers and critics whose subjects, like Wilde, were the victims or practitioners of unusual behavioural patterns.

Some, like J. T. Grein, refuse to make any connection between the man and the artist. In his article on Wilde as dramatist in The Sunday Special of December 9 and 16, 1900, Grein writes:

With the morals of the man I have nothing to do; I have to deal with the artist who has gone, for that artist has left his mark upon literature and upon the stage.³

G. K. Chesterton takes a similar line:

But the very fact that monstrous wrong and monstrous revenge cancel each other, actually does leave this individual artist in that very airy detachment which he professed to desire. We can really consider him solely as a man of letters.⁴

Walter Winston Kenilworth⁵ also leaves Wilde's personal life undiscussed but suggests that he was a great philosopher, a teacher of great moral truths and a child, if not a saint, of God. Arthur Ransome's approach is happily more moderate, discussing in part Wilde's homelife but leaving the uninitiated in a fever of suspense as to the nature of Wilde's 'vice' and 'disease.'⁶

On the opposite side of the fence we encounter Rupert Croft-Cooke who equals Mr. Kenilworth in zeal but errs in the opposite direction. One receives the impression, no doubt because of the wilful inaccuracies the work contains, that Croft-Cooke in his The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde is little interested in Wilde as writer and merely uses Wilde's literary fame as an excuse to talk about what really interests him-- homosexuality. This impression is confirmed by a reading of his book Feasting With Panthers which details the homosexual habits of a large number of writers and artists whose works he can scarcely be bothered to discuss.

Wilde would be the first to appreciate the resultant paradox; those writers who, because of the delicacy of their moral feelings, prefer to leave undiscussed their subjects' sexual foibles and moral frailties, are, in practice if not in theory, adopting Wilde's own 'immoral' attitude that morality and art are independent entities. Conversely, the

group of critics who consider themselves most free from moral conventions can not seem to tear themselves away from a consideration of Wilde's 'inversion.'

This inability on the part of so many critics to hurdle the barriers of Wilde's sexual mores has led to a dearth of serious study of Wilde and his work. The result has been a most regrettable evaluation of Wilde's place in literary history and an extraordinarily superficial assessment of Wilde's works.

"Mr. Wilde had wonderful cleverness, but no substantiality." reported The Pall Mall Gazette in its obituary of Wilde, Dec. 1900. Whilst the same reviewer conceded that "Mr. Wilde's gifts included supreme intellectual ability" he also knew that "nothing he [Wilde] ever wrote had strength to endure."⁷ The New York Times, on the same occasion, took it upon itself to remark in a patronizing manner that:

As a dramatist, Wilde was hampered by his utter lack of sincerity and his inability to master the technical side of playwriting. But his wit, his pleasing literary facility, and his droll views of life made some of his plays rather effective with a limited audience.⁸

Here it must be conceded that Wilde's reputation as a superficial writer was to a great extent self-established. His unorthodox apparel, his use of epigram and paradox and his defensive assertion that he wrote only for wages and wagers⁹ were designed to repudiate any imputation of sincerity. Unfortunately his comedies and stories, delightful in their

wit, paradox, nonsense and charm were dismissed on the same grounds. Karl Beckson gives a very clear view of the process involved:

. . . late nineteenth-century critics habitually judged Wilde's work by a standard now held in disrepute-- namely, its 'sincerity,' which, for the Victorians, implied moral earnestness and fidelity to 'inner' feeling. Aware that sincerity, as a standard of value, was irrelevant to the aesthetic experience, Wilde wrote in 'The Critic as Artist': 'A little sincerity is a dangerous thing. All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling.'¹⁰

While Beckson obviously does not agree with the standard of 'sincerity' as a criterion for judging a work, the view nonetheless held for many years that Wilde, "A witty, paradoxical writer . . . will do nothing permanent because he is in earnest about nothing."¹¹ Harold Child was only one among the many who expounded this attitude, admitting the jester's charm but convinced of the "necessity of conviction, the whole-hearted devotion to truth, . . . demanded of one who would be something higher than a craftsman, [who] would be an artist."¹²

This conviction resulted in a decline in Wilde's reputation as an artist, even in the twentieth century. In fact so much was he neglected that he was omitted even from W. H. Auden's anthology of nineteenth century British Minor Poets! But times and aesthetics have changed and as Beckson points out Wilde has benefited:

Yet Wilde has survived, and since the Second World War, the man and his work have attracted . . . major critics . . . The most recent evaluations contain a

new appreciation and understanding of his ironic methods, his use of mask, and the psychology and strategy of the artist-- which many Victorians either completely misunderstood or barely grasped. Wilde's reputation, therefore, continues to undergo revision, as the tensions of the Victorian age become clearer to us and as we clarify our understanding of Wilde's symbolic relation to that age and to our own.¹³

Curiously enough Enid Starkie's comments on Flaubert's critics parallel Beckson's on Wilde's:

Flaubert, after going through a long period of comparative neglect, of severe criticism, and even of contempt from the intellectuals, is beginning to come into his own again and to attract sophisticated attention. During the period of committed literature, after the 1930's, he was criticized for not being involved in contemporary problems . . . But since the end of the War, readers have begun to grow weary of 'littérature engagée' and are longing to return once more to more disinterested ideals of art.¹⁴

Critics like Richard Ellman, Robert Merle, George Woodcock, Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Robert McGinnis, W. H. Auden and Karl Beckson are only a few of those who now deem Wilde worthy of interest and who have attempted to study Wilde-- artist and man.

Edouard Roditi, a post-war critic, takes this integrated approach in his discussion of Dorian Gray as allegory.¹⁵ He notes, as had James Joyce some forty-one years before,¹⁶ that Wilde avoids detail in his descriptions of the vices, crimes and bad habits, so frequently alluded to in Dorian Gray. Joyce spoke of this as a flaw in the work, Roditi speculates as to the reasons for the omission:

Wilde's unwillingness to handle the details of vice, crime, and the underworld as firmly and realistically as he does those of the world of fashion is indeed more than a mere concession to Victorian prudery. He shrinks from it, in his art, if not in his life, with the neurotic's resistance, as if from confession or from the discovery of a malestrom of experience into which, as in the tempting visions of The Sphinx, he fears being irretrievably drawn.¹⁷

Since, as Roditi has noted, Wilde did not shrink from the details of vice in his private life, we must conclude that he shrank from confession, and, we would add, from close public scrutiny. This mode of writing is consistent with Wilde's manner of existence and behaviour and is a key point in a study of Wilde and his work. Wilde took his public persona and by means of elaborate coiffure and costume turned it into an object of attention and caricature. Woodcock cites this example of contemporary doggerel:

I'm a very aesthetic young man,
A non-energetic young man;
I'm a bitter and mildy
Naturey childy,
Oscary Wildey young man.¹⁸

Wilde masked his most profound feelings in parables, inverted cliches, paradoxes and epigrams but, "It is at last dawning on men's minds that his writings are not so much external ornament concealing a blank void, and that his wit is often wisdom, only occasionally nonsense."¹⁹ Eric Bentley, in his discussion of The Importance of Being Ernest, comes to the conclusion that:

To wear masks was Wilde's personal adjustment to life as it was Nietzsche's. Hence we are right in talking of his pose . . ."²⁰

The riddle of why Wilde disguised himself and his sentiments and did so in the peculiar fashion he did, evokes a curious Wildean paradoxical answer. Wilde's costume and conversation were ploys designed to catch the public limelight. His family's prestige, particularly that of his mother, was considerably diminished by the Travers scandal. Fame would reinstate his family name and bolster the fragile self-image of Wilde which made him feel rather like the dwarf at the Infanta's birthday party.²¹ But the nature of these same attention-getting devices was prism-like. Wilde's apparent frivolity and ostentation refracted and diffused all the light they attracted, creating the impression of an iridescent bubble, gorgeous but insubstantial. Thus Wilde's inner self, defensive, sensitive, and vulnerable existed undetected and unharmed. Like Dr. Renier, we believe that Wilde decided to play the clown because he feared the discovery of "the essential earnestness of his nature."²²

It is easy to see how this system of camouflage relates to one of the central motifs in Wilde's work-- the theme of mask. A mask will attract attention while diverting it from what lies hidden behind. The imagery that highlights this topic varies but always within the framework of self-reflection. The symbol may be a narcissus, a pool, a mirror, a portrait, the moon, or the eyes of another. It does not imply a mere examination of the external but rather indicates an attempt

to find the relation between the external appearance and the internal self, between mask and reality.²³ The question is one of self-reflection and self-knowledge.

The problem was a continuous one for Wilde who fought against the implications of his own self-knowledge but it is a mistake to believe that Wilde did not know himself.

If we patronize them, [Wilde and Nietzsche] the joke is on us. If Wilde seems shallow when we want depth, if he seems a liar when we want truth, we should recall his words: 'A Truth in Art is that whose contrary is also true. The truths of Metaphysics are the Truths of Masks.'²⁴

When Wilde wrote that "The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible," he was speaking of one's duty to self-examination, self-analysis, self-knowledge. 'Know thyself' and it is impossible any longer to react with the unthinking, unquestioning spontaneity that we have when we have not examined our actions and our motives. It is in this sense that we should strive to be artificial, and it was in this sense that Wilde was "always perfectly self-conscious."²⁵ Many of Wilde's parables, stories and plays deal with the voyage of self-discovery necessary for the individual to achieve this knowledge by which he can recognize his own nature, that of others and of good and evil, and with which he can distinguish between reality and mask.

The works of Wilde, like those of Flaubert and Mallarmé, deal with the author's preoccupations, philosophical and aesthetic. We have mentioned only the theme of mask; but

this is not a proper indication of the extent of Wilde's concerns.

As a man and an artist he queried the nature of life and beauty. In as much as any attempt at creation is a statement of the artist's views of beauty and art, all art must lead back to, as it proceeds from the creator. The man, the artist, and the art are inextricably linked. When Lord Alfred Douglas says that in Salomé, "The author's personality nowhere shews itself,"²⁶ he can only properly mean overtly, for the nature of verbal art is such that it reveals the personality of the creator. Art is a product and the careful observer may detect in the child the traits of the parents. Salomé, like all art, is a victim of heredity. It proceeds from the curious and complex person of Oscar Wilde and hence it is our conviction that a study of Salomé will throw some light on Wilde's aesthetics and concerns just as a knowledge of his life will make our study of Salomé more fruitful.

The problems dramatised in Salomé are conflicts that engaged Wilde both as an artist and as a man. The first four speeches of the play we view as a type of prologue in which the questions of the nature of beauty, the relation of death and beauty, death and art, and death and pleasure are raised.

The first line: How beautiful is the Princess Salomé tonight!," relates Salomé to beauty. The moon is then identified as a dead woman, rising from the tomb, seeking dead

things. The second speech of the Young Syrian further indicates the twinship of the moon and Salomé by the two similies describing the moon, beginning, "She is like a little princess" Since every reader knows the story of Salomé the correspondence is completed by the phrase describing the moon: "one might fancy she was dancing." The Page's final speech in the prologue returns to the equation of the moon with death. Hence, by juxtaposition, interconnected imagery and pronouns, (the moon is always referred to as 'she') Wilde establishes from the start a rhetorical parallel between beauty, Salomé, the moon, and death.

The relationship becomes more obvious when one realizes that the Page and the Syrian are talking at each other. The alternate speeches are really continuous monologues, the Syrian's speeches on beauty being interrupted by the Page's reminder of the death entailed in the pursuit of beauty. The Syrian discusses his ideal beauty-- Salomé-- and his perception of that beauty. Veiled from man, hence inaccessible, cold and bright as silver, pure as a dove, she is nonetheless inviting, promising by her suggestion of dance, life, pleasure, and sensuality.

By contrast the Page sees beauty as strange and threatening. The image of a woman rising from the tomb indicates the non-human, immortal element of such beauty. As an immortal she is a dead woman for she is no longer

human, and hence she cannot be understood by mortals. She does not feel the impulses of this mortal world. She will not respond and she cannot be possessed for she is as inaccessible as the moon. In the eyes of the Page the moon is a predator. Vampire-like she rises from the tomb of the sky to seek her carrion. That her prey must be dead is logical for those who pursue this strange beauty are as dead to the things of this mortal world as the sailors who hearkened to the enchanting songs of the sirens. Those who seek this uncommon beauty are artists, in the living of life if not in the matter of creation. They are outcasts from society for they do not share the goals and perceptions of other men.

The young Syrian is an artist figure. In life he seeks Ideal Beauty, i.e. Salomé, and he creates:

. . . he used to tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of a flute." (S. p. 545)

"The artist is the creator of beautiful things." wrote Wilde, adding later in the preface this Paterian echo: "From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician."²⁷ It is significant that the Young Syrian is a prince in another kingdom and a slave in Herod's. He, like the artist, is an outcast, an exile from his own realm. Narraboth's attitude of adoration and humility toward Salomé not only denotes the passion of a young man for a beautiful young girl but is also a symbol of the poet awaiting the favours of his muse.

As in Baudelaire's 'La Beauté' the nature of the muse in Salomé is such as to bear out the page's premonition of fatality and disaster. These lines from Baudelaire's poem are a perfect description of the type of beauty Wilde portrays in Salomé:

Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre,
Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour,
Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour
Eternel et muet ainsi que la matière.

Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx incompris,
J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,
Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.²⁸

Salomé inspires in the Syrian, Narraboth, a love that will last as long as he lives and which will inevitably mean his death. Salomé's beauty is like a statue's, cold as marble, hard as rock, and fatal to those who love it.

The question arises at this point whether beauty is, by its nature, inaccessible or whether man's perverse nature causes him to view the inaccessible as beautiful.

Salomé is, we presume, young and pretty, but is not part of her attractiveness for Herod based on her unattainability, her pronounced indifference, and the taboo against the possession of the daughter of one's wife? Does she mesmerize the youthful captain because of her looks or because she is unavailable by reason of status, indifference and virginity? Is not Salomé's passion for Jokanaan heightened because as a man of God, he is sacred, and untouchable? The fascination of the taboo is made evident in

Dorian Gray when Lord Henry says to Dorian that "It is only the sacred things that are worth touching."²⁹ The unattainable, the one who scorns, is often desirable for those very reasons. George Woodcock suggests that in his private life Wilde experienced a similar love for those who were unattainable or who scorned him. R. Merle claims that this complex came from a series of guilt feelings which led to the desire for punishment.³⁰ Wilde's hopeless attack on the Marquis of Queensbury is thus explicable as an aggressive role, temporarily assumed, "Pour devenir, finalement, la victime de celui qu'il a provoqué."³¹ Thus Wilde's destiny as an outcast could be fulfilled.

Wilde felt himself to be a social pariah. Woodcock and Merle have suggested several reasons for this. The first in importance is Oscar's relationship with his mother. Lady Wilde, or 'Speranza,' wanted her second child to be a girl, a companion of delicate sentiment and refined intellect. When the baby was born male he was nonetheless raised as a female:

Elle habille Oscar en fille, elle lui parle comme à une fille, elle fait de lui sa compagne. Cette femme frigide se jette avec violence dans un amour accapareur. Elle comble Oscar de baisers, elle le costume, elle l'exhibe, elle le caresse, elle le séduit. Oscar ne doit pas courir comme un garçon, ni grimper aux arbres, ni se battre, mais écouter les vers que sa mère lui récite, se promener gravement à ses côtés, paré, ondulé, maniéré et pur. Lui, l'adore, bien entendu.³²

Philippe Jullian and other critics and biographers have also

noted the effect the death of Wilde's sister, Isola, must have had on the young Wilde. They suggest that Wilde, having learned the tenets of Victorian morality via the Travers scandal, felt Isola's death to be a punishment for having loved her too well. The first lines of Wilde's poem on her death certainly indicate the author's awareness of the nine year old girl's latent sexuality, and he may have felt guilty about this.

Lily-like, white as snow
 She hardly knew
 She was a woman, so 33
 Sweetly she grew.

The reader will inevitably have noticed the Mallarméan imagery-- lily-like, white as snow. The dead girl is pure, innocent and beautiful. Given her tender years and the blood relationship, lust for her is therefore wrong.

The guilt Wilde felt about his affection for mother and sister, and later about his homosexual affairs, and the punishment he felt he merited for these imagined sins are manifest throughout his work. 'Charmides' is a perfect example, and a brief discussion of this poem may point to the similar conflicts existant in Salomé.

The plot of 'Charmides' is simple. The young Grecian lad, Charmides, creeps into the temple of the goddess of virtue and, at night, "under the full and brimming moon," disrobes "the marvel of that pitiless chastity," the gigantic statue of Athena. Convinced of his guilt, "ready for death he stood," but nothing happens.

And then his lips . . . fed on her lips, and round
the towered neck He flung his arms . . .³⁴

(This action and the insistence on the disparity in their sizes leads one to speculate whether this rape is not that of the mother by her child). Charmides has broken a taboo. He possesses knowledge that mortals should not possess. He is sinful and guilty. He wanders down to a stream and peers in to see if his changed nature is mirrored on his face. It is important here to remember that narcissism is not only love of one's self but can also imply self-hate.³⁵ Later, pursuing Athena's statue Charmides drowns himself and is washed ashore. Here a nymph, young, white, and virginal, kneels adoringly beside him and tries to urge him back to life. Seeing this the jealous goddess of the virgins kills the nymph. Yet another god arrives and resurrects the two to live and love in Hell.

The implications of 'Charmides' are threefold. Firstly we would compare the statue of Athena to Baudelaire's "rêve de pierre" that is beauty. The young lad, pursuing ideal and sacred beauty, we may see as the artist figure and the theme of the poem as the auto-destruction of the artist in search of the Ideal. Secondly, the poem points out the process by which the artist in his search for beauty inevitably becomes a moral leper and a social outcast, (none of the villagers will go near Charmides after the rape). Merle suggests that Wilde felt himself to be in a similar position:

L'existence ne justifie à aucun moment sa propre existence. Il n'y a pas sa place. Il lui faut donc, s'échapper dans la fantaisie et l'insolence . . . de masque en masque . . . et ne rejetant la vie que parce qu'elle l'a une fois pour toutes rejeté.³⁶

The third implication is on a more personal psychological level where the poem can be seen to illustrate Wilde's desires with regard to his mother and sister and his feelings about these passions. Oedipal relationships should be punished by death; union with the virginal sisterly figure can be accomplished only on pain of Hell.³⁷

This guilt-based ambivalent coupling of desire and revulsion is dramatised in Salomé where the unattainable is seen as desirable until possessed, at which time it is seen to have been sullied and is therefore repulsive.

Wilde's ambivalence towards sensuality was strengthened by his companionship with John Ruskin at Oxford. Wilde met Ruskin after Effie had left her celibate husband for Millais. The author of The Stones of Venice, (1851-1853), made a great impact on the young Wilde. In The Stones of Venice Medieval Venice is virgin, Renaissance Venice is whore.

The moment of transition is, apparently, the moment of copulation and the moment of copulation is therefore (as in a familiar view of the Garden of Eden) the fall.³⁸

For Ruskin consummation and defilement were irrevocably united. He preached these views to Wilde and one can feel in Wilde's works the constant tension resulting from the

struggle of this view with a conflicting one espoused by another Oxford Don. Walter Pater encouraged a different side of Wilde's nature to blossom. The generous, loving, sensual aspect of the youthful Wilde responded readily to Pater's Carpe Diem philosophy. It is possible that one reason for Wilde's receptiveness to Paterianism was the obsession with youth that Lady Wilde had passed on to him and which is another leitmotif of his oeuvre. Certainly Pater's philosophy justified another outlet for Wilde's sexual passions, for the hint of homosexuality runs throughout both The Rennaissance and Marius. Beauty in Paterian terms was a young man crowned with roses, smiling langourously.³⁹ The opposing teachings of the two men enlarged the dichotomy already present in Wilde.

Pater and Ruskin . . . came to stand heraldically, burning unicorn and uninflamed satyr, in front of two portals of his mental theatre. He sometimes allowed them to battle, at other times tried to reconcile them.⁴⁰

Beauty is fascinating, it may also involve moral decay and is therefore repulsive. The 'prologue' of Salomé gives us the key symbol by which we can understand the ambivalent reactions of the characters to beauty. The moon is of course, the symbol referred to. We have already seen that for the Young Syrian she was enticing: "Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess." (S. p. 206). The beauty of the moon seems to Narraboth to

promise life and sensuality. For the Page the moon is like the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud." (S. p. 542). Thus she means death to the page and life to the Syrian. The conflict extends itself into another domain through the imagery involved, for dead women are barren, they bring death not life and they are unattainable. Hence they are sterile rather than fertile, chaste rather than sensual. The conflict between chastity and sensuality is a major source of dramatic tension in Salomé as it was in Wilde's own life.⁴¹

In Salomé Jokanaan is the voice of Ruskin while Salomé's appetite for strange experiences is reminiscent of Paterianism. This may seem at first sight, a strange statement, for Salomé loves the man of God, cold and chaste like the moon but she also has a latent violent and perverted side to her. She wishes to defile, to murder, to kiss the lifeless lips of the dead loved one, and to taste at any price the bitter taste of love.

The conflict between sensuality and chastity wages within the eponymous heroine as the following contrasting speeches from Salomé to Jokanaan demonstrate:

Salomé: Jokanaan, I am amorous of thy body! Thy body is white like the lilies . . . like the snows . . . like the roses; . . . the feet of the dawn, . . . the breast of the moon . . . Let me touch thy body.

: Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; . . . where

the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things. It is horrible. (S. p. 544).⁴²

For this part of the tragedy to work effectively one must admit that the figure of the Saint operates on two levels simultaneously, that his injunctions to her are the voice of her chastity cautioning her and that he also functions as the object of her desire. This is in fact not as contradictory as it may first appear, for Jokanaan's beauty and desirability are of a dual nature. To understand this we must be aware of the symbolic implications of the colours involved.

The above quoted passages, relating the whiteness of Jokanaan's body to first lilies and roses and then, contrarily, to "a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things," illustrate the conflict between desire and revulsion. An examination of the multitudinous references to white and silver in the text will establish white as the colour of chastity and allow the reader to understand by the tone of the image the attitude of the speaker toward chastity. The first of the paragraphs just referred to, for example, shows chastity as beautiful, cold, remote, and desirable. The second quotation however relates it to sickness, leprosy to be explicit. Chastity is, by extension of this simile, a non-social state, a condition that implies alienation. Chastity is seen by the conflict-ridden Salomé as poisonous, like scorpions and vipers. The image of the sepulchre suggests to the reader that it is also associated with death. This is true in two senses. Chaste

men are dead to the enticements of the physical world in which they reside. Moreover, since their condition is one of celibacy, their physical end is final. Fertility and the hope of continued life is lost to them. White is the symbol of chastity which both attracts and repels Salomé.

Black, in Salomé's speech to Jokanaan, may be seen to represent the sensual and the physical.

It is of thy hair that I enamoured, Jokanaan. Thy hair is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees of Edom The long black nights, when the moon hides her face . . . are not so black . . . Let me touch thy hair. (S. p. 544).⁴³

The use of black to represent the sensual runs so much counter to traditional colour symbolism that one is tempted to speculate that it may reflect Wilde's own views on the connection of sensuality with perversion and death. There are certainly symbols which seem to unite the three. Herod has onyxes, like the eyeballs of dead women, black like wine. Herodias who "has filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities " wears a black mitre and praises her daughter for her request for Jokanaan's head. The head is raised forth from the cistern, black like a tomb, by the huge black arm of the executioner, which Marilyn Gaddis Rose sees as a phallic symbol.⁴⁴

Sensuality is related to the long black nights-- a deliberate contrast to the white light of the moon's face. But sensuality also evokes revulsion in the virgin princess:

Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a crown of thorns which they have placed on thy forehead. It is like a knot of black serpents writhing round thy neck. I love not thy hair . . . (S. p. 544).

It is too earthy. It implies an involvement with humanity, the image of the crown of thorns is reminiscent of a Christ image, and it means suffering. The indication here seems to be that physical involvement entails emotional responses which leave one vulnerable to hurt. Moreover, black is associated with death, not only by the symbol of the executioner's black arm and the black winged angel of death but also by the image of the knot of black serpents writhing round a neck. It is interesting to note that Wilde used the symbol of a viper to denote revulsion from chastity. Now he uses it to denote revulsion from sensuality for the knot of serpents is surely meant to suggest the hangman's noose or at least strangulation.

Red, too, is a colour of great significance in Salomé. It is the only colour symbol in this sequence of paragraphs describing Jokanaan's body that does not fit the acceptance-rejection pattern. In our opinion the 'red passage' denotes an attempt on the part of Salomé at unification of conflicting needs.

It is thy mouth that I desire, Jokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate-flowers that blossom in the garden of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets, that herald the approach of

Kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of the doves who haunt the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings . . . It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the Kings of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth . . . Let me kiss thy mouth. (S. p. 544).

From the first sentence of this rather long passage the attempt at unification is present. Jokanaan's mouth has scorned Salomé, she desires it. Hence enjoyment and chastisement are combined. The following sentence in our view, unites scarlet and ivory, sensuality and punishment with chastity. The third sentence supports this argument, for again, both colour elements are present, the red pomegranates and the ivory implement, while the nature of the instrument, a knife, brings forth the element of punishment. Knives can also be used to free prisoners and in effect this is what would be accomplished if Salomé successfully unites her lust with punishment. She could indulge in sensuality and by punishment, free herself from guilt. The mention of king and enemy, implying a victor and vanquished relationship, each element necessary for the existence of the other, is another symbolic formulation of Salomé's attempt at unity. The following two sentences when viewed as a unit reinforce

this theme. Her contemplated ideal of unification is more desirable than either sensuality, (the wine in the wine-press) or chastity and morality, (the doves who haunt the temples and are fed by priests). The image of the slain lion and the slayer parallels the relation between the bestial or sensual and its scourger. It seems to us significant that this ideal which is neither completely sensual nor chaste, in terms of Wilde's imagery, neither black nor white, is "found in the twilight of the sea" the gray area where opposing factors merge. The concluding sentences of the passage are simply restatements of former ideas. The Moabs' relationship with the kings is the same as those of the king and the enemy, the lion and the hunter. The theme of punishment combined with sensuality and the exotic is reiterated one last time with the image of the vermillion painted and coral tipped bow of the Persian king.

One critic has suggested that Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas functioned precisely on this level. That Douglas, by his petulant and erratic treatment of Wilde, allowed Wilde the luxury of the 'sin' with the comfort of the 'punishment' Wilde felt his 'guilt' deserved.

Once we are aware of the multiple functions of these colour symbols we understand more properly not only how the play works dramatically, opposing person to person, speech to speech and colour to colour, but also the nature of the conflicts that beset Wilde and his characters and the nature

of the beauty envisaged by the artist.

In this respect it is important to remember that red is also the colour of blood and hence a symbol of death. The Syrian attempts to follow the path of sensual beauty and dies. Jokanaan pursues chaste spirituality and is killed. Even Salomé's effort at compromise is doomed to failure. One by one, white, black, and red, chastity, sensuality, and chastised sensuality are eliminated as viable methods of existence.

One further thing emerges with striking clarity from Salomé's speech (a microcosm of the thematic conflicts of the play) and her subsequent demise, the total lack of absolutes. Beauty which seemed at first to be presented as a unified absolute is seen to have an underside of sexuality that is often tinged with the macabre and the threatening. Herod's opals make men's minds sad, his turquoises make women barren and his onyxes are like the eyeballs of a dead women. The severed head is brought forth on a silver charger. The pale veil of beauty has been lifted to reveal "une fleur qui ressemble a mon rouge ideal."⁴⁵, a familiar theme in The Nightengale and the Rose, The Star Child, The Young King and The Fisherman and His Soul. The nature of beauty is called into question.

Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l'abime,
Beauté? ton regard infernal et divin
Verse confusement le bienfait et le crime . . .⁴⁶

Herod has to struggle with this very question. At first he has a straightforward view of the moon and of beauty characterized by sensuality. The moon is

. . . like a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too, She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to cover her nakedness but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman. I am sure she is looking for lovers.

(S. p. 546)

But as Richard Ellman notes Herod "is seen to have yielded to Salomé's sensuality and then to the moral revulsion of Iokanaan [sic] from that sensuality . . ."⁴⁷ Herod finally realizes the moral hideousness of the temptress and the spiritual downfall his lust for her has led him to commit.

She is monstrous, thy daughter. I tell thee she is monstrous. In truth what she has done is a great crime. I am sure that it is. A crime against some unknown God. (S. p. 559)

This is analogous to the dénouement of several of Wilde's stories which climax with the recognition of good and evil. Dorian Gray is perhaps the most famous example. George Woodcock quotes Wilde as saying that the chief aim of life is self-realisation.⁴⁸ If by this Wilde meant the attainment of knowledge of one's own self then it is possible to contend that Herod has reached this goal. He seems to have arrived at a moment of self-knowledge:

It is true, I have looked at thee over-much. Salomé, think of what you are doing. This man comes perchance from God. He is a holy man. The finger of God has touched him. God has put into his mouth terrible words. In the palace as in the desert God is always with him . . . if he died some misfortune might happen to me (S. p. 556)

Salomé's final speech to the severed head: "I have kissed thy mouth.", completes Herod's realization of the immoral and unalterable nature of Salomé and leads him to order her death.

Although we have offered one interpretation of Herod's behaviour in having Salomé killed, we must remember Wilde's dictum that "The truth in art is that whose contrary is also true." Herod may have killed Salomé to rid himself and the world of an evil temptation. He may also have killed her out of rage and jealousy, realizing that he could never possess her. The climactic juxtaposition might indicate this:

Salomé: I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan.

Herod: Kill that woman. (S. p. 560)

Similarly, Narraboth perhaps kills himself because he realizes at last the cruel and indifferent nature of his goddess:

Young Syrian: Princess, do not speak such words to him. I cannot endure it.

Salomé: I will kiss thy mouth Jokanaan.

Stage directions: He kills himself and falls between Salomé and Jokanaan. (S. p. 545)

In this case the presence of his corpse would indicate the moral difference that is the barrier between Salomé and Jokanaan. Alternatively, his suicide may represent the despair of the artist at the inaccessible nature of beauty. This would parallel the situation of Jokanaan, who, in his pursuit of the spiritual ideal, is beheaded. Both are outcasts, both

are unable to face the non-achievement of their goals and both are unable to live in a world where those goals cannot be attained. Tom Milne's comment on Pinter's Stanley is an appropriate summary of the saint's position:

The individual, unable to come to terms with society, unable or unwilling to place his ideals at its service, is crushed by society.⁴⁹

The relevance of this comment to Wilde's own life is evident. Neither as a man nor as an artist could Wilde be free to pursue his desires. Eventually he drank himself to death in Paris. When a friend chided him for his excessive alcoholic intake the pathetic figure replied that there was no reason to live.⁵⁰

The despair of the Young Syrian (and Wilde) to capture their ideal is highlighted in Wilde's play by Salomé's inability to attain hers. She wants Jokanaan, chaste, beautiful and inaccessible. If she seduces him, he will no longer be either chaste or inaccessible and therefore probably not beautiful. What Salomé gets is a mockery of her ideal, a bloody head, eyes shut, and tongue stilled. We wonder if this is not Wilde's own sad comment on the reality of the dream.

* * * * *

The protagonists of Wilde's stories are often similar to Oedipus. Theirs is a journey of self-discovery in the course of which they may or may not learn to recognize good, evil, and guilt within others and within themselves. When

Herod says: "Only in mirrors should one look, for mirrors do not but show us masks.", he is stating his attempt to blind himself to his new self-perception, i.e. that his lust for Salomé has led him into horrible moral straits.

Herodias comments that: "These men are mad. They have looked long on the moon." The implication, seen to be confirmed by the workings of the drama, is that the ideal, (the moon) once perceived, demands pursuit. Such pursuit inevitably leads to madness or disaster. Hence the multitude of injunctions in the play not to look upon the ideal.

The Page urges the Narraboth, whom he loves, not to look on the beauty of Salomé because he knows that something disastrous, if only the alienation of the Syrian from himself, will inevitably follow.

You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous . . . something terrible may happen. (S. p. 538)

This warning is repeated at least four more times before the dénouement of this particular sub-plot, which comes in Salomé's speech to the young Syrian. Unable to persuade him to do her will with the promise of a green flower, (a reference to the green carnation Wilde habitually wore) she finally promises that:

. . . tomorrow when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol buyers, I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you Narraboth . . . Look at me Narraboth, look at me. Ah! you know that you will do what I ask of you. (S. p. 542)

Narraboth succumbs. When he realizes that by acceding to her request he has set a chain of destiny and fatality in motion he urges:

Princess, Princess, thou who art like a garden of myrrh, thou who art the dove of all doves, look not at this man, look not at him! . . . (S. p. 545)

Jokanaan, once aware that Narraboth has killed himself and that in her nonchalance over the matter Salomé has indeed proved herself her mother's daughter cries:

Daughter of an incestuous mother, be thou accursed! I do not wish to look at thee. I will not look at thee . . . (S. p. 545)

and he descends into his cistern to protect himself from the madness that comes to those who look on beauty that is not spiritual. John in one sense wins. He dies purity intact. For when Salomé has his head in her hands she says:

But wherefore dost thou not look at me Jokanaan. Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thy eyes! Lift up thine eyelids Jokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? . . . Behind thine hands and thy curses thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God . . . If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me. I, I saw thee, Jokanaan and I loved thee. (S. p. 558)⁵¹

The case of Herodias and Herod is parallel to that of the Page and the Young Syrian. The first words Herodias speaks are:

Thou must not look at her! You are always looking at her. (S. p. 546)

This injunction is uttered at least six more times by Herodias and eventually Herod realizes the point; that he has been drawn into a chain of events from which there is

no escape. When Salomé asks for the head of Jokanaan, Herod's reply reveals his new knowledge:

You say that to trouble me because I have looked at you all this evening. It is true, I have looked at you all evening. Your beauty has troubled me. Your beauty has grievously troubled me and I have looked at you too much. But I will look at you no more.

The 'moral' seems to be that if one wishes to be pure or happy one must avoid the pursuit of beauty or the ideal for it is never attainable. The manifestation of it which one might grasp always contains something strange and impure, something which will alienate man from his fellow man or from God.

My heart is as some famine-murdered land
 Whence all good things have perished utterly,
 And well I know my soul in Hell must lie
 If I this night before God's throne should stand.⁵²

wrote Wilde, who, unlike his heroine, her lover, or her beloved, realized what had happened to him in his own life.

The metaphysical question posed by the play's ambivalent resolution is: "What is the way out?" There is no answer: the ways of Salomé, Jokanaan and the Young Syrian all bring death. A Racinian fatality is at work. The characters cannot act other than they do and the nature of their acts entails a fatal destiny such as we see in Baudelaire's 'Beauté':

Le Destin charmé suit tes jupons comme un chien;
 Tu sèmes au hasard la joie et les désastres,
 Et tu gouvernes tout et ne réponds de rien.⁵³

The nature of this destiny is not clear. There are indications that it is God's will for some of Jokanaan's prophecies are fulfilled, but on the other hand, religion is specifically mocked in the first scene with the soldiers and the Cappadocian:

First Soldier: The Jews worship a God that you cannot see.

The Cappadocian: I cannot understand that.

First Soldier: In fact they only believe in things that you cannot see.

The Cappadocian: That seems to me altogether ridiculous. (S. p. 538)

Moreover Jokanaan makes his dire prophecies of doom about Herodias and Herod and the misfortunes befall everyone but them.

Perhaps the most important speech in the play is Herod's final: "Kill that woman!". This is the first time any of the characters has attempted to fight his desires and to reverse the destiny involved. Wilde himself periodically tried but with little success. In Salomé, however, he seems to be implying that each man creates his own destiny.

Jokanaan, the Young Syrian, and Salomé are responsible for their own unfortunate ends. Each of them could say with Baudelaire's l'Héautontimorouménos:

Je suis la plaie et le couteau!
 Je suis le soufflet et la joue!
 Je suis les membres et la roue!
 Et la victime et le bourreau!⁵⁴

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Wilfred M. Leadman, 'The literary position of Oscar Wilde', Westminster Review, CLXVI, August 1906, pp. 201-8. Cited by Karl Beckson (ed.) in Oscar Wilde, The Critical Heritage, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 260-8.
- 2 J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969, pp. 8-9.
- 3 J. T. Grein, 'Wilde as a dramatist', The Sunday Special, December 9 and 16, 1900, Cited Beckson pp. 233-236.
- 4 G. K. Chesterton, 'Wilde as a great artist and charlatan', Daily News October 19, 1909, p. 3. Cited Beckson, pp. 311-314.
- 5 Walter Winston Kenilworth, A Study of Oscar Wilde, N. Y., R. F. Fenno and Co. N. D.
- 6 Arthur Ransome, Oscar Wilde, N. Y., Mitchell Kennerly, 1913.
- 7 Anon., 'Obituary Notice', The Pall Mall Gazette, December 1, 1900, p. 2. Cited Beckson, pp. 229-30.
- 8 Anon., 'Obituary Notice', The New York Times, December 1, 1900, p. 1. Cited Beckson, pp. 225-227.
- 9 Arthur Ransome, op. cit., p. 16. and Wilfred H. Leadman, in Beckson, op. cit., p. 263.
- 10 Karl Beckson, op. cit., p. 1.
- 11 Francis Thompson, Letter to a friend, August 1890. Cited Beckson, p. 1.
- 12 Harold Child, 'On Wilde's Collected Works', Times Literary Supplement, June 18, 1908, p. 193. Cited Beckson, pp. 302-7.
- 13 Karl Beckson, op. cit., p. 32.

- 14 Enid Starkie, Flaubert, The Making of the Master, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. ix.
- 15 Edouard Roditi, 'Fiction as Allegory: The Picture of Dorian Gray', in Oscar Wilde, N. Y., New Directions Publishing Corp., 1947, pp. 113-24. Cited in Oscar Wilde, (ed.) R. Ellman, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969, pp. 47-55.
- 16 James Joyce, Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, August 19, 1906, Letters of James Joyce, (ed.) R. Ellman, N. Y., 1966, Vol. 2, p. 150. Cited in Beckson, p. 269.
- 17 Edouard Roditi, op. cit. pp. 52-3.
- 18 George Woodcock, The Paradox of Oscar Wilde, N. Y., George Macmillan Company, 1950, p. 114.
- 19 Wilfred M. Leadman, in Beckson, p. 266.
- 20 Eric Bentley, 'The Importance of Being Ernest', The Playwright as Thinker, N. Y., Reznal and Hitchcock, 1946, pp. 172-77, Cited in Ellman, op. cit., p. 115.
- 21 A remarkable number of Wilde's protagonists are deformed, hermits, or other social outcasts. Merle has speculated that this reflects Wilde's self-image much as the portrait in Dorian Gray does.
- 22 Dr. Renier, cited by Woodcock, op. cit., p. 220.
- 23 Dorian Gray, The Birthday of the Infanta, The Star Child, The Nightengale and The Rose and The Devoted Friend all have for their basic theme this question of mask and real y. "I showed that the false and the true are merely forms intellectual existence." Gide, Oscar Wilde, London, W. Kimber, 1951, p. 63.
- 24 Eric Bentley, op. cit., p. 115.
- 25 Arthur Ransome, op. cit., p. 100.
- 26 Lord Alfred Douglas, 'Salomé', Spirit Lamp, IV, Oxford, May 1893, pp. 21-7. Cited Beckson p. 139. Robert McGinnis, 'The Image of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in Wilde's Plays, Literature

and Psychology, Vol. 18, (1968) p. 123 ff. McGinnis says that since Wilde was sexually both fascinated and repelled by the 'barbarity' of women, he created a heroine whose response to the male would be equally ambivalent and hence Salomé in a Jungian sense is a true anima image of Wilde's own soul. p. 126.

27 Oscar Wilde, 'Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray', in G. F. Main (ed.) The Works of Oscar Wilde, London, Collins, 1957, p. 17.

28 Charles Baudelaire, 'La Beauté', Les Fleurs du mal, (ed.) Adam, Paris, Garnier Freres, 1961, p. 24.

29 Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Works of Oscar Wilde, p. 52.

30 Robert Merle, Oscar Wilde ou la Destinée de l'Homosexuel, Paris, Gallimard, 1955, pp. 89-104.

31 Robert Merle, op. cit., p. 89.

32 Robert Merle, op. cit., p. 20. Rupert Croft-Cooke denies this version of Wilde's childhood, saying that it is myth sprung from a photo of Wilde as a child, dressed, in common Victorian fashion, like a girl. The photo called "Oscar Wilde Enfant" in Philippe Jullian's Oscar Wilde gives the lie to Croft-Cooke's assertion.

33 Oscar Wilde, 'Requiescat', The Works of Oscar Wilde, p. 709.

34 Oscar Wilde, 'Charmides', The Works of Oscar Wilde, p. 740.

35 Robert Merle: "Car le Narcissisme n'est pas seulement amour, il est haine de soi." op. cit., p. 28.

36 Robert Merle, op. cit., p. 76.

37 Merle notes that Wilde's descriptions of Constance Lloyd before he married her are similar to those of his sister, and the nymph in 'Charmides'. Furthermore after the Wildes had their first child, Oscar began or resumed, (depending on whose account is accepted) his homosexual activities and, when Constance was pregnant with the second child, Wilde wrote that he could not force himself to touch her. Their sexual relations were never resumed. This may have been because Constance had

changed into the taboo mother-figure. Merle, op. cit., p. 52.

38 Richard Ellman, 'Overtures to Salomé', Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, No. 17, 1968, pp. 17-28, Cited in Oscar Wilde, Ellman, (ed.), p. 79.

39 Ellman speculates that Pater was referring to the heresy that Jesus and John were lovers as well as Leonardo and his model. op. cit., p. 84.

40 Ellman, op. cit., p. 86.

41 c. f. Robert Merle's comments on this, op. cit., p. 28.

42 Merle speculates that a similar split existed in Wilde which Merle sums up as: "Voilà donc où conduit ce grossier amour des hommes pour les femmes: à cette boue!", op. cit., p. 23.

43 Richard Ellman, op. cit., p. 89, says that these speeches are a perversion of the Song of Songs.

44 Marilyn Gaddis Rose, 'The Daughters of Hérodiades . . .', Comparative Drama, Vol. 1, #3, 1967, p. 172-178. She also sees the upright figure of John the Baptist in the cistern as a phallic symbol. Moreover the sword on which the Syrian falls she sees as a phallic symbol and the crushing of Salomé under the shields of Herod's soldiers she views as "emblems of the upright male object." pp. 177-8.

45 Charles Baudelaire, 'L'Idéal', Les Fleurs du mal, p. 25.

46 Charles Baudelaire, 'Hymne à La Beauté', op. cit., p. 28.

47 R. Ellman, op. cit., p. 90.

48 G. Woodcock, op. cit., p. 79.

49 Tom Milne, 'The Hidden Face of Violence', in Modern British Dramatists, A Collection of Critical Essays, (ed.) Russell Brown, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1968, p. 41.

50 George Woodcock, op. cit., p. 95.

51 R. Ellman, op. cit., p. 89. Notes that Salomé perverts the Song of Songs to describe a man's beauty rather than a woman's. One wonders if this same technique is not in use here. The words are so reminiscent of parts of J. S. Bach's Sleepers, Wake. For example: Behold Me, I am thy Salvation. I seek Thee my life. Behold Me thy life. I show thee My face. (especially for Salomé and the Young Syrian.) Oh show me Thy face, Thy mercy and grace, Come Jesus, Behold Me. The biblical text beginning "Lift up thine eyes onto the hills from whence cometh the Lord." is also called to mind, the paradoxical use of the quotes reflecting Wilde's "peculiar duality of attitude towards the world." (Woodcock, op. cit., p. 4).

52 Oscar Wilde, cited by A. Ransome, op. cit., p. 53.

53 Charles Baudelaire, 'Hymne a La Beauté,' op. cit., p. 28.

54 Charles Baudelaire, 'L'Héautontimorouménos,' op. cit., p. 85.

NOTES

1 Edmund Bergler's 'Salome', The Turning Point in the Life of Oscar Wilde', Psychoanalytic Review, XLIII, Jan. 1956, pp. 97-103, was received too late to be used in this chapter. The omission of the article is however, of little importance. Bergler states that Wilde wrote plays with cruel women in them in order to convince himself that he was justified in turning from women to homosexuality where he sought the "reassuring breast-substitute" of the penis (p. 98). Salomé was the last play of this ilk that Wilde wrote. After this he turned totally towards homosexuality, hence Salomé, says Bergler, marks the turning point in Wilde's life.

2 Liselotte Dieckmann's 'The Dancing Electra', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, II, Spring 1960, pp. 3-16 was also received too recently to be used in this chapter. Dieckman does however agree with our contentions about the juxtaposed images of moon and princess in the first paragraphs of Salomé.

CHAPTER III

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ: HÉRODIADE

Face à une oeuvre comme celle de Mallarmé,
l'intelligence hésite.¹

- J. P. Richard -

The peculiar events of Wilde's childhood left him with conflicts between chastity and sensuality that were voiced in many of his works though perhaps nowhere more forcefully than in Salomé. Mallarmé's famous line from Hérodiade: "J'aime l'horreur d'être vierge" would indicate that he too had ambivalent sentiments about chastity and sensuality. One has only to compare the pornographic narrative of 'Une Negresse', the account of a lesbian relationship between an experienced Negress and a young female child, with the sombre, uneasy and repressive mood of Hérodiade to be made aware of the opposing sentiments existing within Mallarmé's work.

Charles Mauron, Léon Cellier, and Adile Ayda have argued that this duality had its origin in the traumatic effect that the deaths of his mother and sister had on the young Stéphane.² Having been raised a Christian, Mallarmé was convinced that his mother and sister were alive in Heaven. Naturally he wanted to be reunited with them. His

corporality he resented as a barrier to the attainment of Paradise. As he grew older and his sexual drives manifested themselves he regarded his body as a traitor to his soul which strained toward the Ideal. The desire to transcend the misery of death³ and to reach some sort of Absolute was consistent within him. But so was the attraction he felt toward the sensual. In fact, in later years, when he was no longer able to force himself to write of 'L'Idéal', he turned instead to pornography.⁴ As Charles Mauron says: "L'oscillation persiste jusqu'à la fin."⁵

One of Mallarmé's basic conflicts then, like Wilde's, involved sexuality in combat with chastity. But, whereas for Wilde the problem was largely social in origin (that is to say Victorian societal structures and mores were predominately to blame for whatever moral anguish Wilde faced), for Mallarmé the question was from the start an internal matter of metaphysical angst. Chastity becomes connected with immortality.

It can easily be understood then, given his obsession with the problem of death, that the demise of Harriet Symth, Mallarmé's young love, had a devastating effect on the poet. He lost faith in God. This left him facing a terrifying void at the end of life and as the need for an 'au-delà' where he could escape the miseries of life and be reunited with his mother, sister and Harriet, still persisted Mallarmé's

ideal accordingly changed its nature, becoming fundamentally mystical in concept. Sir Maurice Bowra, in speaking of the symbolists, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, described the process succinctly:

The fabric of their Christian beliefs had been mutilated or undermined, and feeling a need for a gospel to take its place, they found in the Beautiful something which unified their activities and gave a goal to their work. To this belief they clung with a conviction which can only be called mystical because of its intensity, its irrationality, its disregard for other beliefs and its reliance on a world beyond the senses.⁶

The change in Mallarmé's metaphysics can easily be traced in his work. 'Les Trois Cigognes' is a very early and autobiographically revealing work. It was written after the death of Mallarmé's sister Maria of whom Deborah Parrit, the dead girl of the story is a thinly disguised version. Deborah, with angelic help, rises from her tomb and visits her father, a not too subtly concealed Stéphane.⁷ The short story, although not logical, is easily comprehensible. The traditional form and syntax and the element of the supernatural reflect Mallarmé's vision of an ordered but mysterious world. Moreover in this early work there is no desire for death, for the dead can be resurrected and one can communicate with them.⁸

'Les Fenêtres', a later work, reveals the poet's disgust with death, disease, religion and the human condition in general. One can also see the poet's resultant decision to search for a Paradise of escape:

Ainsi, pris du dégoût de l'homme à l'âme dure
 Vautré dans le bonheur, où ses seuls appétits
 Mangent, et qui s'entête à chercher cette ordure
 Pour l'offrir à la femme allaitant ses petits,

Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées
 D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie, . . .9

But Mallarmé, as Sartre points out, was "trop lucide" not to know that he was inventing, not discovering, an escape:

On a fait remarquer que l'idéal dont il est sans cesse question dans ces poèmes reste une abstraction, le travestissement poétique d'une simple négation. C'est la région indéterminée dont il faut bien se rapprocher quand on s'éloigne de la réalité. Elle servira d'alibi: on dissimule de l'être en prétendant qu'on s'éloigne pour rejoindre l'idéal.¹⁰

Although some critics, such as Williams, think that Mallarmé maintained a firm belief in his 'Idéal', it is impossible for us, after having read his poems, to concur. Mallarmé fought against his knowledge, but Sartre is right; Mallarmé knew that he was inventing a poetry of escape. He realized, at least at certain moments, the enticing but empty nature of the Absolute which seemed to haunt and taunt him.

De l'éternel azur la sereine ironie
 Accable, belle indolemment comme les fleurs,
 La poète impuissant qui maudit son génie,¹¹
 A travers un désert stérile de Douleurs.

There were really only two possible responses to this knowledge. The first, given in 'Le Sonneur' is suicide.

Je suis cet homme. Hélas! de la nuit désireuse,
 J'ai beau tirer le câble à sonner l'Idéal,
 . . .

Et la voix ne me vient que par bribes et creuse!
 Mais, un jour, fatigué d'avoir en vain tiré,
 O Satan, j'ôterai la pierre et me pendrai.¹²

The second is a Paterian plunge into sensuality with the poet no longer pretending to believe in l'Idéal.

--Le Ciel est mort.-- Vers toi, j'accours¹³ donne,
O matière L'oubli de l'Idéal cruel . . .

But the physical leads to death and the poet even 'though he knows the revolt is 'inutile et perverse' cannot accept this. "Je suis hanté. L'Azur! l'Azur! l'Azur! l'Azur!"

Critics using a psychological-biographical approach to Mallarmé have speculated that he invented and maintained the concept of an ideal because of his wish to be reunited with his loved ones. This may well be, but how far is this knowledge useful? The psychological-- biographical approach, if used excessively, not only denies to the writer the possibility of becoming the poet 'Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change', but can deflate verse in a most remarkable manner. M. Maaron, for example, uses this approach to explicate Hérodiade.

Hérodiade, he discovers, is the untouchable mother-figure and Saint Jean the naughty boy (Stéphane) who dares peep at his naked mother and who therefore must be punished, i.e. beheaded.¹⁴ In our opinion this interpretation does nothing for Hérodiade, Mallarmé or the reader. In Hérodiade, the metaphysical questions that so sorely perplexed Mallarmé are explored with all their complexity of ramifications. M. Maaron's method is simply not adequate. We will therefore approach Hérodiade in a different manner-- through a knowledge

of Mallarmé's metaphysics, and aesthetics. The metaphysics, which we have already briefly outlined are much simpler than the aesthetics. In 'L'Azur' and 'Le Sonneur' the poet confesses that he is unable to continue to deck the weeping idea with art. The breakdown of his certainty about the absolute brings a corresponding disintegration of normal word usage and syntax. As a result Mallarmé's poetry becomes progressively more obscure as his vision of 'l'Idéal' becomes less definite. The perfect example of this is, of course, 'Un Coup de Dés'.

Like the gesture of throwing dice, symbolic of Mallarmé's conviction that "Rien n'existe que la matière et le hasard", *Hérodiade* is a symbol-- an expression of the search for transcendental Beauty and for Absolute Truth. In order to express such abstract concepts; the ideal, the super-natural, a reality beyond the senses, Mallarmé made use of irregular syntax and punctuation, symbols and unusual images. A critic contended that "Mallarmé n'a guère conçu l'écrit que comme la conscience angoissée, ironique, lucide, ou orgueilleuse de l'écriture."¹⁵ The poet's famous letter to Cazalis at least demonstrates his consciousness of the unique qualities of his verse:

J'ai enfin commencé mon Hérodiade. Avec terreur, car, j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: Peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.¹⁶

Henry Nicolas calls the result "une poétique de l'anéantissement"¹⁷ and it is not difficult to see why. Mallarme nihilated things. Matter, as such, is of no importance to him. He picks out what he, in his subjective apprehension of reality, considers important and discards the rest. Thus for example, *Hérodiade* wanders through a garden with trembling flowers; all else is envelopped in mist.

Suzanne Bernard describes this poetry "où toutes les paroles s'effacent devant la sensation" as fluid and suggestive, evocative rather than definitive, rhythmic, sonorous, musical and incantatorial. In Mallarmé's poetics, she says, "la valeur significative du mot y est toujours sacrifiée à sa valeur sonore ou suggestive."¹⁸

In spite of the fact that even in 1864 Mallarmé's method was not novel, (Blake and Baudelaire had used similar techniques before, as had the school of mystic poetry) it still creates difficulties for the reader. Nicolas complains that:

Avec nous le sens semblera donc jouer à cache-cache,
il sera à la fois ici, et là, partout et nulle
part . . . 19

Jean-Pierre Richard confesses to experiencing similar problems:

Rien de plus glissant que ces poèmes dont le sens
sembler se modifier d'une lecture à l'autre et qui
n'installent jamais en nous la rassurante certitude
de les avoir vraiment définitivement saisis.²⁰

Even Mallarme used the word 'insaissisable' to describe parts of Hérodiade. Most of the difficulties with Mallarmé's poetry,

especially the later works, arise from a failure to understand or apply Mallarmé's aesthetics. He did not often in his later years use words in a normal sequential syntactical pattern. Therefore to seek the literal and precise meaning of a phrase, as C. M. Bowra points out, "is to ask for exactness where it does not exist."²¹ Mallarmé wanted to portray states of mind or soul, ideas, not realistic characters or events. What Paladilhe and Pierre say of Moreau is astonishingly applicable to Mallarmé:

Action or figures in movement had no place in his pictures because he considered them inferior objects of contemplation, leaving no place for reflection. His aim, now clearly defined, was to paint not acts, but states of mind, not actors on stage but representative figures. Ideas and feelings alone seemed worthy of depiction.²²

This is why *Hérodiade* is so startlingly different from the *Salomé* of Flaubert or Wilde. She is Beauty seeking to become transcendental, she is the poet, the philosopher seeking after Eternal Truth.²³ It is our opinion that given the multiple significance of the poem and the heroine, the dialectical quality of the superimposed levels and, the counterpointed images are a perfect expression of the fight between Thought and Sense, Order and Chaos, Sensuality and Chastity, and Life and Death that exist in *Hérodiade*. Mallarmé's ability to suggest or evoke abstracts such as these stems as much from his use of structure and form, or lack of it, as from any unusual use of language. In *Hérodiade*, for example, the

dramatic and narrative structures are the natural complement to the thematic structure. This being so, an examination of the format of the work will be helpful in understanding the general purport of the poem.

Most evident is the division of the unfinished poem²⁴ into three parts: the 'Ouverture Ancienne d'Hérodiade', the 'Scène' and the 'Cantique de Saint Jean'. The distribution of characters has also been carefully worked out. Only the 'nourrice' appears in the 'Ouverture'; Saint Jean is the sole figure in the 'Cantique', but both Hérodiade and the nurse are present in the 'Scène'. On this basis one would expect the 'Scène' to be the place of dialogue, confrontation, and conflict, which it is. Similarly, it is not unreasonable to anticipate unity in the monologues that commence and conclude the poem, and this too is the case. With such abrupt changes of character and scene one wonders how the poem can stand as a complete and unified whole. The figure of Hérodiade is a major unifying factor. Whilst she appears directly only in the 'Scène', she is obviously present in the thoughts and speeches of the 'nourrice' in the overture and more ambiguously present in the "elle de jeunes ivre" of the 'Cantique'.²⁵ Hérodiade then is present throughout the poem. When one remembers that the 'Ouverture Ancienne d'Hérodiade' was, in fact, written after the 'Scène' it becomes possible to speculate, without unduly straining the imagination, that

Mallarmé meant to portray, in the persons of the nurse and her mistress, two different stages of the same consciousness. Viewed in this manner, the nurse's incantation becomes the former song of Hérodiade and the nurse, the Hérodiade of by-gone days. This is, of course, a tentative suggestion, as is the idea that each of the three sections and characters of the poem represent various attitudes of Mallarmé toward the problems posed in the poem. What does seem certain is that the characters, by virtue of being (in the terms of the text) humans living in the world, are without exception confronted with the same metaphysical questions which so troubled Mallarmé; and that each character and section of the work represents a possible attitude to these problems.

* * * * *

The 'Ouverture'

The situation lamented by the nurse in the overture is the one Mallarmé wrote of in his letter to Cazalis when he spoke of his "lutte terrible avec ce vieux et méchant plumage, terrassé, heureusement, Dieu."²⁶ God has been vanquished but the consequences are fearful:

Mais comme cette lutte s'était passée sur son aile osseuse qui, par une agonie plus vigoureuse que je ne l'eusse soupçonné chez lui, m'avait emporté dans les Ténèbres, je tombai, victorieux, éperdument et infiniment . . .²⁷

If there is no God then one is left with a void, with chaos and with death. In the overture, as in Mallarmé's letter,

the Absolute, whether God or 'Le Grand Rien qui est la Verité', is symbolized by a bird. 'Abolie', the first word of the poem, goes right to the heart of the matter. God has been abolished. The implications of this are twofold. Firstly death is everywhere.

The tower has become 'cinéraire' and 'sacrificatrice', a 'lourde tombe'. The countryside, 'déchu' and 'triste', has become a desert in which there is 'pas de clapotement'. Water, a traditional sign of life is 'morne' and resigned. The pomegranates, a sign of sensuality and fecundity have fallen, cut by the night frost. Autumn is extinguishing her torch in the pool and winter, the time of sterility and death, is approaching. Even inside the tower death is present. The description of Hérodiade's bedroom is a veritable catalogue of things decaying and dying. The trophies are of a by-gone age, the goldwork is 'éteinte', the eyes of the sibyls on the tapestries are shrouded and their nails are old. The silver is black and the candle extinguished. The flowers are dropping their petals onto wax that is dead. The bed, symbol of life, procreation and sensuality, is empty. The windows of the room look onto the barren landscape.

The existence of God promises immortality; deposition of the deity implies death. Hence the insistence on the inexorable passing of time once the 'bel oiseau' has flown.

De l'horloge, pour poids suspendant Lucifer,
 Toujours blesse, toujours une nouvelle heurée,
 Par la clepsydre à la goutte obscure pleurée,
 Que, délaissée, elle erre, et sur son ombre pas
 Un ange accompagnant son indicible pas! (Hérodiade, p.43)

The nurse is worried about Hérodiade, but not, seemingly, about her own destiny. And yet for her, too, the beautiful bird of the dawn has gone. If the nurse is not unselfish to the point of sainthood, the implication is that there is a connection between Hérodiade and the nourrice so that concern for one implies concern for both. The nurse does not like the absence of a god and the death that it involves. For her it is a 'crime! bucher! supplice!'. She wishes to resummon the Deity, to protest 'à l'heure d'agonie et de luttes funèbres!' "Eli Eli lama sabachthani?" is her lament. Her incantation rising through the antique holes and pure lace of the shroud, is a desperate attempt to reach Hérodiade and to recall the bird-god of faith. Failure is foreshadowed by the mention of the shroud. The nurse's chant, surrounded by unresponsive shadows and silence 'rentre également en l'ancien passé,/ Fatidique, vaincu, monotone, lassé'.

The lament of the 'nourrice' is not the only sign of protest against the overthrow of the old order. 'L'ongle qui parmi le vitrage s'élève/Selon le souvenir des trompettes' is another. The glass through which the finger rises probably refers to the 'vitres profondes' or the mirror ('Eau froide . . . dans [un] cadre gelée') into which Hérodiade gazes as into a crystal ball, seeking the Absolute. The fingernail

which is raised amidst the glass is connected with the memory of Hérodiade's father offering his trumpets to the sky. This act, performed by the King while lying on 'un tas gisant de cadavres', (a gruesome reminder of his own mortality) is an act of faith. The raised finger then signifies familial ties and faith, and, as such, is a protest against the icy state of Hérodiade, 'exilée en son coeur précieux', and the new god of death and chaos. But again failure is prefigured. The King's gesture has for its only witnesses the uncaring 'vieux sapins'. As for the finger:

. . . Le vieux . . .
 Ciel brûle, et change un doigt en un cierge envieux
 Et bientôt sa rougeur de triste crépuscule
 Pénétrera du corps la cire qui recule! (H, p. 43)

Mallarmé's poems can often be used to explicate one another.²⁸ In this case the 'mysterious splendours' of Hérodiade might be somewhat clarified by reference to 'Les Fenêtres'. In this poem the poet, like the dying man in hospital, turns his back on the hard and disgusting world of disease and death and turns his gaze toward the window. Through a trick of the sunlight on the morning dew the appearance of a halo or a diadem is created round his reflection and he sees himself as an angel-- immortal. Whatever the window be, art or mysticism, "-- Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité--" the poet loves this vision of rebirth into an earlier paradise of Beauty. The parallel with Hérodiade is obvious. The heroine too, has turned her

back on life and gazes into the 'vitres profondes' seeking escape from the realities of the world. The 'vitrail' amidst which the beckoning finger is raised is probably mysticism rather than art, for the swan, here as in 'Le vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui', el simbolo de la pura y perfecta creacion poetica", like the ancient bird-god, no longer visits the tower, "lugar ceremonial de un cierto culto; el de la poesía."²⁹ This is logical since, in Mallarmé's mind, the absence of anything other than matter and chance precludes the possibility of things transcendental, spiritual or supernatural and this is the second implication of the dawn-god's exile: the Icarian poet of the spiritual and the Ideal vanishes too. The nurse wants to recall the god, which would allow for the spiritual and hence for 'ideal' poetry, but the

alusion a guipures y sudarios identifica la vestidura sacerdotal del celebrante de la poesía con la mortaja del poeta muerto de su inoperancia creado 30

and it is clear that such a thing is impossible.

Ideally the poem should be able to evoke the spiritual. It should be for the reader what the 'vitres profondes' should be for Hérodiade, a vehicle for the perception of the Absolute, the Beautiful. The phrase that we glanced at above; "Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité" may thus be seen as an example of Mallarmé's humour. For the subject of the poem, the looking glass is that of

mysticism, for the reader it is that of art, but the reader, called upon by the poem, to reflect and search as Hérodiade must do, does not realize that the poem is his mirror.

Unfortunately, as Hérodiade's dreams are to be disappointed for "Helas! Ici-bas est maître", so a poetry of the Absolute is doomed to failure. There appears, to the nurse at least, to be nothing transcendental of which to write. The star, symbol of the 'au-delà' is "mourante et ne brille plus". As Suzanne Bernard has said:

Tous les thèmes, toutes les images du poème
évoquent la mort des illusions anciennes, le
retour au néant des voix du passé et des rêves défunts,
l'abandon d'une âme exilée restée seule.³¹

The nurse is a simple person, a symbol "del apego de la vida, de la continuidad biológica de las generaciones, del amor carnal a la existencia."³² She distrusts the strange behaviour and thoughts of her mistress, feeling that they can lead only to disaster. She urges a return to faith. The reappearance of God would mean a renewal of life in the countryside and garden, and would bring Hérodiade back to ordinary sensual and emotional life and faith. What the nurse is urging is a return to a primordial state of innocent belief, to the Garden of Eden. She wants to reverse the process of the fall which for Hérodiade, as for Eve, was brought about by a desire for knowledge. The heroine is described in terms of "froideur", "clarté", and "diamants", all terms used by Mallarmé, as by Valéry, as symbols of the

intelligence. Indeed Jean-Pierre Richard and others have drawn our attention to the component parts of the heroine's name,-- Heros, Eros, Diadem, Diamants etc., and in doing so have lent support to this view of Hérodiade as a symbol of reason.³³ One may even wonder if the "cher grimoire" that Hérodiade refuses to use is not a Mallarméan conceit for the bible, which has been described in terms reminiscent of the original meaning of grimoire-- the black book of mysteries and spells. It seems more certain that he is wryly referring to his own poem, for a 'grimoire' was also an unintelligible piece of writing.³⁴

If Mallarmé's heroine is a philosopher, a seeker after Truth, then the description of her descent "sous la lourde prison de pierres et de fer" is probably a metaphor for her deeper intellectual probing into the questions of life and death. Hérodiade has faced the finality of death and lost faith in God and the promised immortality.

* * * * *

The 'Scène'

"Tu vis! ou vois-je l'ombre d'une princesse?" From the start the essential problem of the nature of life and death is posed. Indeed it is this conflict that gives rise to all the conflicts in Hérodiade. As Richard says: "Ce sont bien . . . les incertitudes de son destin charnel qui transforment Hérodiade en une héroïne de la réflexion."³⁵

Like her creator, Hérodiade does not want to face the possibility that "nous ne sommes que de vaines formes de la matière." One possible way of forgetting this unpleasant fact is to plunge into the physical pleasures of life, drowning reason in sensuality. We have seen this attitude presented in l'"Azur"; in Herodiade the position and its consequences are worked out in much more detail. Part of Hérodiade, "ayant peur de mourir (lorsqu'elle) couche seul(e)" wants to adopt this position. In the terms of the poem the nurse is the symbol of this part of Hérodiade. Hence her symbolic attempts to engage the princess in physical activities. In each case the opposing part of Hérodiade, intelligence or purity of Beauty, fights these temptations.

The nurse first tries to kiss the hands of the princess. The connection between the acceptance of this action and a denial of the search for the Eternal is made clear:

A mes lèvres tes doigts et leurs bagues et cesse
De marcher dans un âge ignoré . . . 36

The nurse's effort fails. The significance of Hérodiade's first word, "Reculez" is thus made apparent. The second temptation offered the princess by the nurse is perfume "de l'essence ravie aux vieillesse de roses". M. Mauron's comments on the symbolic Ronsardian import of roses in Hérodiade and in Mallarmé's works in general, makes evident that acceptance of the scent implies acceptance of corporality and temporality.³⁷

In rejecting "la vertu Funèbre" of the perfumes, "Laisse là ces parfums! ne sais-tu que je les hais?", Hérodiade is not only rejecting a symbol of death but attempting to preserve her reason from drowning in the intoxicating fragrances of sensuality. Her beauty must not be of an earthly nature. She considers her essence to be not of roses, but of the "pâles lys" which are the symbol of other-worldliness, purity and immortality.

The nurse next stretches out her hand to touch a tumbling lock of the princess' hair. The extraordinary vehemence of Hérodiade's reaction to this gesture: "Arrête dans ton crime", is only comprehensible once the centrality of the incident to the whole scene is understood. Hérodiade's hair is a symbol of her intelligence. It is her key to the Absolute Truth, her only possible hope of discovering and becoming part of the Eternal. She asks the nurse to help her in caring for it by holding the mirror up for her. To do this would be to reflect, at least partially, the realm of Hérodiade's values. The sibylline nurse, aware of the import of "des cheveux endormis" which she sees as "le dais sépulchral" does not do this. Instead she treats Herodiade as a human and approachable woman and reaches out her hand to touch the tress. With this gesture she threatens the inviolability and remoteness Herodiade wishes to cultivate. Moreover the princess sees her hair as a symbol of her chaste and unworldly Beauty. Hence she speaks of it as: "le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés", and says that "mes cheveux que la lumière enlace sont immortels." Hérodiade's wish to

preserve these qualities is expressed in these lines:

Je veux que mes cheveux qui ne sont pas des fleurs
A repandre l'oubli des humaines douleurs,
Mais de l'or, à jamais vierge des aromates,
Dans leurs éclairs cruels et dans leurs pâleurs mates,
Observant la froideur stérile du metal, . . .

One can readily understand why she would think it a sacrilege to have this sort of pure beauty and reason polluted by the physical and unchaste hands of the 'nourrice'. What is perhaps not so obvious is how cleverly Mallarmé has slipped in an answer to Hérodiade's claims. ". . . cette tresse tombe . . ." is an indication that Hérodiade's beauty, like that of anyone else, will decay and pass away. Hérodiade herself has a premonition of disaster:

Ce baiser, ces parfums offerts et, le dirai-je?
. . . Cette main encore sacrilège,
Car tu voulais, je crois, me toucher, sont un jour
Qui ne finira pas sans malheur sur la tour . . .

The last conscious effort on the part of the nurse to bring her mistress back to life is her suggestion that Hérodiade take a lover. This would bring Hérodiade into the realms of the physical, and the earthly and take her out of the dangerous avenues of eternal hope in which she wanders. But Hérodiade's calling, like that of the poet, is a higher one; she must seek after Truth and the transcendental for their own sake, and she must preserve her Beauty unsullied and ideal. One wonders if Beauty for the sake of Beauty as demonstrated in the following lines, may not be a comment on Art for Art's sake, (or on Mallarmé's poetry):

N: . . . et pour qui, dévorée
 D'angoisses, gardez-vous la splendeur ignorée
 Et le mystère vain de votre être?

H: Pour moi. (H. p. 40)

Hérodiade acknowledges that she does at times feel the pull of emotional and sensual ties, such as "quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis".³⁸ Then she loses sight of Paradise. The 'Scène' is however, the narrative of her refusal to accept her own temporality and earth-bound nature. The denial of her own corporality and mortality is symbolized by her visit to the underworld of mortality and bestiality. The journey is a symbol of the exploration by the mind of the nature of life and death. At one point, in front of the gushing waters of sensuality Hérodiade almost comes to accept physicality and mortality as her destiny. She starts to shed the petals of her lily-white reason, but her intelligence reasserts itself, pointing out that the consequences of sensual life are death. She becomes afraid and refuses the charms of the sensual. Her feet calm the waters of the sea, an act symbolizing the refusal of life's urges.

The heroine decides to refuse all human ties and to pursue Truth wherever it may be. By meditating and self-reflection, symbolized by her lonely walks and constant obsession with the mirror, she pursues her destiny, as Mallarmé pursued Truth and Beauty by writing poems. Their destiny is Absolute. It has no higher aim, no further significance. The

discovery of the Truth, the transcendence of the mortal, are ends in themselves. When the nurse asks Hérodiade for whom she is keeping the vain mystery of herself, Hérodiade replies, "Pour moi." This is more than Art for Art's sake, it is Purity for immortality's sake, Truth for Truth's sake. The pleasures of her bed are not those of the flesh but rather of the intelligence. Hérodiade can only keep herself pure and therefore fit for immortality by refusing sensuality. The following lines are a perfect demonstration of this sentiment:

J'aime l'horreur d'être vierge et je veux
 Vivre parmi l'effroi que me font mes cheveux
 Pour, le soir, retirée en ma couche, reptile
 Inviolé sentir en la chair inutile
 Le froid scintillement de ta pâle clarté
 Toi que te meurs, toi qui brûles de chasteté
 Nuit blanche de glaçons et de neige cruelle! (H. p. 47)

It is difficult to remain unimpressed by Mallarmé's skillful use of almost unstated tension. The reminder of the death of the intelligence, "Toi qui te meurs", would slip by almost unnoticed if it were not reinforced by "toi qui brûles . . .". One is reminded, although perhaps not consciously, of the finger which, like a burning candle, was melted into wax.

Similarly the nurse's apology:

Pardon! l'âge effaçait, reine, votre défense
 De mon esprit pâli comme un vieux livre ou noir . . .

can be seen as a threatening statement, a reminder of the passing of time and things. This sentence provokes Herodiade's curt rejoinder: "Assez!" The same technique is used in the nurse's description of the princess Hérodiade, as "un astre".

The nurse presumably intends no irony, but the reader is all too aware of the memory of the star which is "mourante et qui ne brille plus". Intelligence and death, Beauty and death are seen to be linked inextricably together.

The "eau froide" to which Mallarmé refers is of course the mirror, but it can also be linked by a study of the imagery of other Mallarméan poems, to "eau morte". When Herodiade looks into the "eau froide" of her mirror then, she is examining death, trying to pierce beyond it and discover the Absolute which she so hopes must exist. If this Eternal Truth were to exist, Hérodiade would have to be pure to join it. Thus she concentrates on disassociating herself from the impure things and people around her. She refers to herself in the third person as a way of alienating her essence from her body and she perceives herself through a mirror. She looks at herself and "à travers ce qui fut moi",³⁹ she sees the shadowy outline of the Eternal, suggested perhaps by the beauty of her reflection, begin to appear. Hérodiade's beauty is, in some senses, suggestive of Mallarmé's vision of the eternal. It is non-human, star-like and gem-like. But the fact that when Hérodiade looks into the mirror she sees herself reflected is an indication that there is nothing beyond the physical.

L'ombre lointaine qu'Hérodiade poursuivait nostalgiquement dans le brouillard de sa "glace au trou profond" devient alors la "nudité" terrible mais vérifiée d'une pensée non plus éparse "mais réunie à elle-même, orientée vers sa vérité la plus essentielle."⁴⁰

Hérodiade, at certain moments realizes this Truth. Hence the revelatory phrase: "Ô charme dernier, oui! je le sens, je suis seule." (H. p. 48)

Le miroir est ainsi une surface abyssale, mais close, à la fois écran et gouffre.⁴¹

The Absolute is Death, for Beauty and Intelligence. The 'nourrice' asks: "Madame, allez-vous donc mourir?" and Hérodiade replies "Non", but when the nurse has left she adds: "Vous mentez, o fleur nue/De mes lèvres . . ." The ambiguity of this sentence is reflective of Hérodiade's state of mind. Is she referring to her statement about death, or is she denying her voiced perception of the Absolute? The reader is never certain, for Hérodiade decides not to act. "J'attends une chose inconnue" she says: it is on this note that we leave her. "Jusqu'à la fin l'oscillation persiste" indeed applies to Hérodiade.

The brilliant analogy of Hérodiade and reptile which we have quoted on page (105) (reptile inviolé. . .) now takes on new significance. It is a singularly apt description of the queen's whole state of being. A reptile is neither fish nor mammal. It lives partly in the world of the sea and partly on land. Hérodiade too, is of two natures, and two worlds. She is neither totally woman nor totally asexual. She lives half in the physical world and half in the metaphysical. The description of her walk through the garden

confirms this for it takes place neither at night, the time of the other-world, nor in the day, the time of life. Her's is the ambiguous time of pre-dawn. Hérodiade has the knowledge that she sought. Now she should choose between night and day. The light of day melts the candle wax and brings death, but day also symbolizes sensuality and pleasure. Night too, is ambiguous:

Tantôt terrible et dangereuse, dont les 'vagues, mortes, hélas'assaillent et rongent notre vie, tantôt au contraire "approbatrice et presque protectrice". Car si tout s'est éteint et fermé, il ne s'offrira plus à nous de fausse issue vers la lumière. La mort de l'illusion fait disparaître aussi toutes les anciennes séquelles du Rêve: espoirs et mystifications, fatigues, souffrances d'un désir fatalement insatisfait.⁴²

The 'Cantique'

Again it is to the structure that one must first turn when trying to decipher the last and most ambiguous part of Hérodiade. We note the progression at work throughout the poem. In the 'ouverture' the nurse, representing the physical side of life, was alone. Her voice, the advocate of sensuality, life and faith, was "du passé longue évocation". Mallarmé's surprise that the bird of "vieux et méchant plumage, . . . Dieu" was so hard to conquer is parallel to the nurse's astonishment that this force of faith and life, "antique, ainsi qu'une étoile encensée sur un confus amas d'ostensoirs refroidis", (H. p. 42) still lingers in "les plis jaunes de la pensée". The nurse's incantation then, represents the past beliefs of the tri-part consciousness of

the work. Hérodiade, as has been noted, symbolizes the intelligence and it is the struggle between the body and the mind, faith and mystic atheism, as represented by the dialogue between the 'nourrice' and Hérodiade that constitutes the 'scène'.

The 'Cantique' is the last and final stage in the dialectical workings of the poem. Mallarmé has presented us with the thesis: art, life, body, christianity, and the antithesis: sterility, death, mind and mysticism. From the 'Cantique' one expects a synthesis. There are several factors that indicate that one's anticipations are to be fulfilled. One might first note that the beginning words of the three initial stanzas: *Le Soleil, Je sens, Et ma tête*, indicate that the conflicting parts of the personality, body and mind, are now in sufficient harmony as to be represented by one figure, that of saint Jean. It is no longer necessary to use separate characters to symbolize warring factors for the factors are no longer at war. The first line, depicting the sun, exalting the supernatural rise of the head, bears this out.

Possibly the most unusual and noticeable syntactical feature of the 'Cantique' is its lack of punctuation. Each noun-verb-object structure is so entwined with another or others that periods and commas would define and limit the multiple senses of the text. They are therefore eliminated.

The resultant impression is a curious one of unity, complexity and ambiguity. There seem to be three primary grammatical ambiguities that give rise to conflicts amongst critics and readers.

Does the "elle de jeûnes ivre" refer to Hérodiade or the head? In our opinion it makes no difference to an understanding of the text which way it is read since they are both symbolic of mind encased in the corporal.

The second question is - to what do the "le" and the "vous" of stanza six refer?

Là-haut où la froidure
Eternelle n'endure
Que vous le surpassiez
Tous ô glaciers (H. p. 49)

It is our opinion that the "vous" refers to the glaciers, symbols of intelligence and physicality and the "le" to the sun or the "bond hagard". The import is the same in both cases. Neither matter or mind can go beyond the boundaries of the temporal. This is given symbolic expression by the redescending head, sun and scythe. What can transcend is the "pur regard" or mystic faith which has lead the saint to freely deliver himself to death.

That some transcendental happening has occurred is beyond question. The 'halte' is a supernatural one. "La froidure éternelle" is spoken of as existing, and the head becomes illuminated by the 'au-delà' as it nods its acceptance of the finality of physical death. There has been a rebirth,

symbolized by the baptism.

The thing that is never made clear is the nature of the 'Là-haut', Paradoxically, it does not matter. If an Absolute Principle exists, Jean's soul, though not his body, will have joined it. If the 'froideur éternelle' is nothingness and Chaos, then in his choice of death, Jean has vanquished it by imposing an order on it. He has transcended his animal self, whose first instinct is survival, to become a being with a soul, one who does not need a god.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Jean Pierre Richard, L'Univers poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1961, p. 1.

² Mauryon's Mallarmé l'obscur was unavailable but Henri Mondor quotes a relevant passage, albeit with disapproval:

Cette double mort et ce double amour enfantin . . .
suffisent largement à expliquer . . . ce regret de
Paradis perdu Tout l'érotisme de Mallarmé en
restera marqué Une sensualité très vive le
porte vers la femme; mais bientôt c'est la soeur
qu'il doit aimer. D'où sans doute son goût d'une
part pour les chastetés assez troubles, farouches,
intangibles mais nues et très proches du désir, la
chasteté d'une Hérodiade précisément Mondor,
Mallarmé plus intime, Paris, Callimard, 1944, pp. 50-51.
C.f. also Cellier, La Morte qui parle, Paris, Presses
Universitaires de France, 1959, p. 14. and Mauryon's
comments on Ayda (unavailable) in Introduction to the
Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé, Berkeley, California,
University of California Press, 1963, pp. 11 ff.

³ Mallarmé also wanted to escape the ennui of the century.
See his letter to Cazalis, April 27, 1863: "Besides is there
such a thing as happiness in the world? And should it really
be sought anywhere but in dreams? (trans.) Henderson. Quoted by
Charles Mauryon op. cit., p. 94. 'Les Fenêtres' deals with the
same theme.

⁴ J. P. Richard, op. cit., p. 74.

⁵ Charles Mauryon, Mallarmé par lui-même, Paris, Editions de
Seuil, 1964, p. 131.

⁶ Sir Maurice Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism, London,
Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1947, p. 3.

⁷ Léon Cellier, op. cit., p. 22.

⁸ Mauryon says that when Mallarmé's mother died he thought
of her as a guardian angel who was in touch with him and God.
Mauryon, Intro. Psych. Mal., ed. cit., p. 11.

- 9 Mallarme, 'Les Fenêtres', Oeuvres Complètes, Paris, Gallimard, Pléiade, 1945, p. 33.
- 10 J. P. Sartre, Préface to Stéphane Mallarmé, Poésies, Paris, Gallimard, 1945, p. 6.
- 11 Mallarmé, 'L'Azur', Pléiade, p. 38.
- 12 Mallarmé, 'Le Sonneur', Ibid., p. 36.
- 13 Mallarmé, 'L'Azur', Ibid., p. 38.
- 14 Charles Mauron, Intro. Psych. Mal., ed. cit., p. 47. "If the princess so violently cherishes the "honor of being a virgin", is she greets with abnormal reactions the slightest amorous suggestion made by the nurse, it is obvious that she is struggling against an inner longing which is confessed in the last lines. The sinful curiosity of Saint Jean and the punishment which follows belong to the most classic expression of the Oedipus Complex".
- 15 Thibaudet. La Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé, Paris, Gallimard, 1926, p. 382.
- 16 Letters to Henri Cazalis, Oct. 1864. in Mallarmé's Correspondance, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 137.
- 17 As Suzanne Bernard says 'Le mot n'est donc là que pour évoquer les idées d'absence, d'anéantissement, de désespoir . . . S. Bernard, Mallarmé et la Musique, Paris, Nizet, 1959, p. 99.
- 18 Bernard, op. cit. p. 99.
- 19 Henri Nicolas, Mallarmé et le symbolisme, Paris, Larousse, 1965, p. 14.
- 20 J.-P. Richard, op. cit., p. 553.
- 21 Bowra, op. cit., p. 11.
- 22 Jean Paladilhe & José Pierre, Moreau, London, Thames & Hudson, 1972, p. 26.

23 Charles Mauron, Intro. Psych. Mal., ed. cit., pp. 98-99, says that Hérodiade and Mallarmé both saw themselves dying and being reborn in the mirror.

24 We have not chosen to use Gardner Davies' Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère, an attempt at finishing Mallarmé's work, for these reasons. (1) Mallarmé left only fragments with little indication of how or if he was going to use them. (2) This means that Gardner Davies has composed his own poem and we are studying Mallarmé not Davies. (3) It is our conviction that Mallarmé would never have completed the poem so to study a finished version is absurd. The version used here is from Mallarmé's Oeuvre Complète, Gallimard 1945, hereafter referred to as (H. p. x).

25 Critiques are not unanimous as to the referent for 'elle.' Is it 'ma tête' or an illusion to Hérodiade who may be watching the beheading and who might surely be described as drunken with fasting?

26 Hartley's introduction to the Penguin edition of Mallarmé, 1965, p. XVII, quoting Mallarmé with no reference.

27 Hartley, op. cit., p. XVII - XVIII quotes Mallarmé with no references.

28 Mondor, op. cit., p. 51 quotes even Mauron as admitting that "la véritable application d'un poème de Mallarmé nous sera toujours donné avec plus aptitude et de profondeur par les autres poèmes que par tel ou tel détail biographique".

29 Blas Matamoro, Obra poética de Stéphane Mallarmé, Buenos Aires, Edition del Mediodía, pp. 105-106.

30 Mallarmé, 'Les Fenêtres', Pléiade, p. 33.

31 Suzanne Bernard, op. cit., p. 98.

32 Blas Matamoro, op. cit., p. 104.

33 Jean-Pierre Richard, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

34 Mallarmé was fond of using words in their ancient or etymological senses. He even carried around his own etymological dictionary with him.

35 J. P. Richard, op. cit., p. 174.

36 The rings are jewels or metal and therefore signs of intelligence. To infect the intelligence with emotionalism would be to destroy it.

37 Charles Mauron, Introduction à la Psychanalyse de Mallarmé, Neuchâtel, La Baconnière, 1950, pp. 27 ff.

38 This line may be interpreted differently. It may be that when Hérodiade thinks of the sensual and emotional ties her eyes are lost in this physical paradise.

39 J. P. Richard, op. cit., pp. 175-176.

40 J. P. Richard, op. cit., p. 176. See also Léon Cellier, op. cit., pp. 76-83.

41 J. P. Richard, op. cit., p. 161.

42 J.P. Richard, op. cit., loc. cit.

CONCLUSION

In their excellent book on Gustave Moreau, Paladilhe and Pierre have noted that:

there is a remarkable continuity and coherence between four minds so different as Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé and Moreau, who shortly after were united in the admiration of Joris-Karl Huysmans, who filled nine pages of A Rebours with description of the two paintings of [Salomé].¹

The co-authors might well have added Wilde to their list, for he, too, was impressed by A Rebours (often posited as the golden book which poisoned the mind of Dorian Gray). Furthermore, Wilde was, as we have seen, sufficiently fascinated by the callous but beautiful figure of Salomé to base a play on the ambiguous heroine.

Certainly some continuity exists in the three separate depictions of the Salomé/Hérodias legend which we have discussed. Each work has in common with the others the themes of Beauty, Temptation, Morality, Death and Art. But the treatment of these concerns varies so drastically from author to author and from work to work that what emerges is much more akin to a progression than a continuum.

And yet it is precisely this diversity of treatment which interest us. Flaubert, Wilde and Mallarmé had very different visions of Salomé. Each author in his creation has portrayed his Ideal Beauty. The high-voltage sensuality of

Flaubert's exotic Salomé is essentially that of the erotic Kuschiuk Hanem whom Flaubert met on his trip to the Orient in 1850. The Arabian courtesan is said to have performed the "danse de l'abeille" for Flaubert and his friend Du Camp.² The experience was so physically overwhelming that the youths who provided the musical accompaniment for the dancer were obliged to blindfold themselves in order to protect their innocence. Later Flaubert returned to pass the night with Kuschiuk. The events of that short period, Flaubert later described as the most intense physical experience of his life.³ Starkie suggests that Salomé was modeled on the sinuous figure of Kuschiuk.⁴ Be that as it may, it was certainly this type of overpowering sensuality that Flaubert meant to depict in Hérodiade.

This obviously contrasts with the white, cold, and chaste beauty of Wilde's Salomé and yet, as we have seen, there is another side to beauty in Wilde's work. Wilson Knight says that:

In Salomé a decadent and bejewelled paganism in a sulphurous atmosphere of beauty and blood lust asserts itself statically and repetitively against the equally repetitive denunciations of Jokanaan or John the Baptist, whose Salomé desires. Always in Wilde the two worlds want to meet.⁵

Unlike Flaubert's unified concept of beauty as something strange, romantic, elegant, sensuous and taboo, Wilde's view of beauty was dual: chaste, cold and sadistic at one time, pagan and passionate the next. Wilde and Flaubert are,

however, companions in their portrayal of Beauty as being composed of physical attributes. This sentiment was not shared by Mallarmé for whom the use of language was an inhibiting factor in the portrayal of Beauty which in his works is of a transcendental and intellectual rather than physical nature. One recalls the vernacular complaint in Eliot's Sweeney Agonistes: "I gotta use words when I talk to you." There are indications that Mallarmé felt similarly dissatisfied and might have been happier had he been able to create poetry without using words. On December 31, 1865, in a letter to Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Mallarmé explains that the subject of Hérodiade was Beauty but that "le sujet apparent n'est qu'un prétexte pour aller vers Elle."⁶ Hérodiade's beauty then, is meant to symbolize something else.⁷ Beauty in Mallarmé is always incomplete. In Hérodiade this is symbolized by the heroine's chastity and refusal of things physical. It is a beauty diametrically opposed to that in Flaubert's work. It is a pity that Flaubert did not liken Salomé to a plant for it would surely have resembled one of Des Esseintes' artificial and monstrously beautiful fleurs du mal, or at the very least a pomegranate. The juxtaposition of Wilde's image of Salomé as a little silver flower and Mallarmé's description of the pale lilies that form the essence of Hérodiade would then have indicated the progression that exists from the fleshy sensual and exotic beauty of Flaubert's heroine through the

ambivalent enticing but cold protagonist of Wilde's work to the ethereal beauty of Mallarmé's Princess.

Obviously physical beauty exists in Mallarmé's works. We have discussed at some length the sensual accoutrements of *Hérodiade's* bedroom; but whereas in Wilde the author and heroine are divided in their attitudes toward the chaste and the sensual, in Mallarmé sensual beauty is considered to be a hindrance to the attainment of Ideal Beauty.

If one were to pose Acis's question: "When Beauty's the prize what mortal fears dying?" to Flaubert, Wilde and Mallarmé, one would be sure only that the replies would differ in nature. On the basis of Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, particularly the 'Cantique', we believe his response would be: "Not I." Gardner Davies says of the Mallarméan hero: "La créature doit faire le sacrifice total de sa personnalité pour renaître génie impersonnel."⁸ One remembers Mallarmé's own observations in "Quant au livre":

. . . le sacrifice qu'y fait, relativement à sa personnalité, l'inspirateur, aboutit complet ou c'est dans une résurrection étrangère, fini de celui-ci: de qui le verbe répercuté et vain désormais s'exhale par le chimère orchestrale.⁹

In his own life Mallarmé subjugated the man to the poet, to the point of taking notes whilst his son, Anatole, was dying, in order not to lose the experience. In *Hérodiade* Saint Jean dies in an attempt to obtain the Eternal, which, as we have seen, is, by Mallarmé's definition, Beauty. The

temptations that stood between the attainment of Beauty by Hérodiade and Mallarme were, it is true, to some extent of an emotional and sensual nature; but most of the indecision however was based on fear of the unknown.

Est-il moyen, ô Moi qui connais l'amertume,
D'enfoncer le cristal par le monstre insulté
Et de m'enfuir, avec mes deux ailes sans plume
-- Au risque de tomber pendant l'éternité?10

Saint Jean's act is thus one of affirmation and faith for he loses not only his life in this world but runs the risk of discovering that l'éternité is 'le néant'.

Wilde is perhaps closer than Flaubert is to Mallarmé on this point, for in his society the pursuit of Beauty as he imagined it, whether chaste or sensual, was said to lead infallibly to spiritual death and damnation. Pleasure and not happiness, the carpe diem philosophy adopted by one part of Wilde and visible in Salomé, was not without its drawbacks. For Mallarmé, the search for Beauty involved facing the temptations of the physical and risking death. In Wilde's Salomé the pursuit of beauty involves risking life, art and spiritual damnation. But precisely because Death is inevitable no price, not even spiritual death, seems too high for pleasure, and Beauty. Salomé, the Young Syrian and initially Herod, follow this course recklessly. Unlike Flaubert who, with few regrets, decided to pursue Beauty in Art rather than in Life, Wilde was undecided about the wisdom of his choice. The facility with which Flaubert made his decision was closely

involved with his hatred and fear of life and the desire to escape. Wilde however wanted to live. He, like Herod, desired beauty not in the abstract realm of the mind's meditations but actual and accessible in the physical world. Although the play's ending is ambiguous Herod apparently decides that the cost of Beauty is too great. Wilde's poem, 'Hélas', is consistent with this attitude.

To drift with every passion till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play,
Is it for this that I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom and austere control?

• • •
Surely there was a time I might have trod
The sunlit heights and from life's dissonance
Struck one clear chord to reach the ear of God:

• • •
I did but touch the honey of romance--
And must I lose a soul's inheritance?ll

Beauty and its attendant temptations inevitably involve the whole question of morality, traditionally considered central to the legend of Salomé. In Hérodias the questions which Flaubert debated with Georges Sand are dramatised. What is the function of Art and of Beauty? Is it wrong for an artist to create a work of art without imposing a moralistic framework on it? Although the immoral Hérodias lives and Saint John dies it may not be possible to ascertain Flaubert's final moral stance from the conte. At the close of the short story we see Hérode, alone and deeply unhappy. The head of John is illuminated in the darkness of the hall. Moreover the only other person in the vicinity is Phanuel who is praying, a

Christian faithful to the end. These factors would tend to suggest that Christianity or at least 'morality', as represented by John and his followers, will continue. However Herod is a figure that arouses within the reader a strange sort of pity. He is faced with a loveless life and old age. He is surrounded by lies, treachery and political pressures. Can he be blamed for seeking the Beauty, passion, and youth he sees embodied in the almost transcendental 'âme vagabonde' of Salomé? The answer depends on one's particular moral framework. Utilitarians would say "yes", aesthetes, "no".

Flaubert's work is inconclusive, perhaps he, like Herod, is left in a state of indecision and moral anguish but it is our opinion that he remained faithful to the moral values he shared with Mallarmé, that is, that questions of a moral or social nature should be subordinated to the creation of Art.¹²

In Salomé Wilde goes one step further, asking what are the consequences to the artist and the man if he is immoral? His life, his works and Salomé give different responses. Society punished him for the pursuit of beauty in life. In Salomé, Hérod survives but without the thing he craved. Morality demands of Herod that he kill the thing he loves.

Death is another central theme common to these works. On the dramatic level the narratives have one point in common-- in each John the Baptist is beheaded. In Hérodiade the saint

dies for his moral principles believing that he is going to a better world. This may be Flaubert's ironic comment on two things. First, that the individual is always the loser when he decides to help society, and secondly, that death, even without an 'au-delà', would be a welcome escape from the miseries of life. Wilde, on the other hand, fears death. Unlike Jokanaan and Salomé, he does not have great hopes of immortality and it is for this reason that he wishes to taste life to the full. The argument is a circular one. Because of a fear of death, life should be lived to the full. To do so means searching anywhere and by any means for pleasure. The consequences of this, as seen in Salomé are death. The young Syrian dies in the pursuit of Beauty, as do Salomé and Jokanaan.

The argument in Mallarmé is concentric to that in Wilde. It is fear of the finality of death that drives Mallarmé and Hérodiade to seek an Eternal. The nature of such an Absolute if it exists is such that one can only realise it through Death. Death in Mallarmé then is the key to the great unknown. John's suicide is an act of courage. He, unlike the Saints in Flaubert and Wilde, submits willingly in order to know.

The different attitudes towards death reflect the different metaphysics of the authors. Flaubert's 'Beyond' was posterity, hence his work is complete in itself, a creation that exists by right of and for the sake of its beauty.

Wilde's metaphysics were ambivalent for obvious reasons. Logic told him there was no God. Emotionally he would very much have liked to believe.¹³ But if one believes in a Christian god one believes in an afterlife and there, society told Wilde, he would be condemned to Hell. Wilde therefore was encouraged to want God not to exist. As for Mallarmé what happened here on Earth was but a pale reflection of the 'au-delà', rather like Baudelaire's system of correspondances.

Each separate metaphysic or world view implied a distinct style. The shift away from the portrayal of vivid and sensual experiences of life towards that of vague transcendental yearnings brought with it a corresponding transformation in treatment and style.

There are many quite obvious examples of this in the texts. The progressive disintegration of grammar and syntax has already been noted. Flaubert uses brighter colours than Wilde in whose work the colours are positively vivid compared to those of the dull and aged beauty in Hérodiade. The use of exotic detail becomes progressively lighter as we read from Flaubert and Mallarmé. Hérodias has more characters than Salomé, which has more than Hérodiade. The noise levels diminish in the same order. Action becomes less in each work. Flaubert for example, is the only one who describes Salomé's dance. In Salomé there is simply a stage direction reading, "Salomé dances the dance of the seven veils." (S, p. 555). Mallarmé, although he complimented Wilde on his definitive

evocation of Salomé wanted nothing so vulgar as a dance in his work.¹⁴ Accordingly the relevant lines which Gardner Davies pieces together in Les Noces d'Hérodiade describe the princess dancing for a moment in one place without moving. Although this may sound strange, not to say physically impossible; one may, if charitable, presume that Mallarmé meant to describe an inner state of exultancy, passion or harmony.

It may be uncharitable but relevant to recall Howard Fast's comments on the great "modern tradition" in literature which, quoting Milton Howard, he says is based on "helplessness, disgust, self-loathing, mysticism, and contempt for social action."¹⁵ In describing the style which results from this retreat from reality Fast notes that it:

. . . embarks on a search for an alternative to life, and results inevitably in a neurotic intellectual embrace of death. (. . .) the immediate by-product of the retreat from reality is a degeneration of the literary product itself, even if that product were to be judged-- as these authors would have it judged-- by virtue of form alone. Clarity becomes muddled and finally vanishes; style is cheapened as standards decay; triteness is accepted and constantly overlaid with unselfconscious self-adoration; obscurity is raised to the level of a virtue, and action is logically shunned.¹⁶

Although there are many evident weaknesses and much evidence of lack of critical acumen in Fast's vitriolic book, his comments quoted above should be borne in mind when reading Mallarmé's poetry. Undoubtedly Mallarmé gave to poetry a freedom it wanted and needed and which has produced some fine works. Mallarmé's disciple, Valéry, is a good example of this,

being perhaps a better poet than the master, whilst owing the proper development and use of his talents to Mallarmé. The questions that Mallarmé raises may be old but his statements about them are not trite. Many modern dramatists still use the theme of death, and rational man in the irrational universe as a major literary theme. There is no reason to denigrate Mallarmé for occupying himself with man's condition.

One must question the value of Salomé as a dramatic work for such an eminent critic as Mario Praz has said of Wilde's play that:

It was, in fact, from the plays of Maeterlinck . . . that Oscar Wilde derived the childish prattle employed by the characters in his Salomé . . . which reduces the voluptuous Orient of Flaubert's Tentation to the level of a nursery tale. It is childish, but it is also humoristic, with a humour which one can with difficulty believe to be unintentional, so much does Wilde's play resemble a parody of the whole of the material used by the Decadents and of the stammering mannerism of Maeterlinck's dramas-- and, as a parody, Salomé comes very near to being a masterpiece.¹⁷

Obviously one's opinion of any work of art depends on what one expects and likes. J. T. Grein thought that Salomé was a marvellous play:

For Salomé, gorgeous as the woman of its title, a poem full of charm, quivering with passion, the gates of the literary stronghold of the Mercure de France were opened to him. To say that Sarah Bernhardt had undertaken to bring it before London is to testify to the excellence of its dramatic fibre and the felicity of its poetry.¹⁸

Arthur Ransome, suggests that Salomé needs no other justification than its innovativeness. He reminds us that Wilde:

left no form of literature exactly as he found it. He brought back to the English stage a spirit of comedy that had been for many years in mourning. He wrote a romantic play, [Salomé] which necessitated a new manner of production, and may be considered the starting point of that revolution in staging, that, happily, is still proceeding.¹⁹

Wilde then did for drama in England what Mallarmé did for Poetry in France. As for Flaubert, perhaps one can say of Hérodias, what Suffel said of the Trois Contes:

Et ce petit volume, finalement, est peut-être le plus représentatif de l'oeuvre de Flaubert.
Peut-être le plus représentatif de toute son époque.²⁰

The three versions of the Salomé legend which we have studied are perhaps the most central works of Flaubert, Wilde and Mallarmé revealing their concerns and conflicts as they represent those of the century.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Paladilhe and Pierre, Gustave Moreau, London, Thames and Hudson, 1972, p. 100.
- 2 Enid Starkie, Flaubert, The Making of the Master, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. 196.
- 3 Ibid., loc. cit.
- 4 Ibid., p. 195.
- 5 G. Wilson Knight, 'Christ and Wilde' in (ed) Ellman, Oscar Wilde A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1969, p. 144.
- 6 Gardner Davies, Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 16.
- 7 Mauron speculates that the Absolute for which Mallarmé sought was a poetic transfiguration of his dead mother.
- 8 Gardner Davies, op. cit., p. 17.
- 9 Mallarmé, Pléiade, p. 370.
- 10 Mallarmé, 'Les Fenêtres', Ibid., p. 33.
- 11 Wilde, The Artist as Critic, N. Y., Random House, 1970, p. XIV.
- 12 One remembers Flaubert's letter of Dec. 1875 to Georges Sand:
Votre bonne lettre du 18, . . . m'a fait beaucoup réfléchir. . . . que voulez-vous qui je fasse? Je travaille dans la sincérité de mon cœur. Le reste ne dépend pas de moi. Je ne fais pas de la désolation à plaisir, croyez-le bien, mais je ne peux pas changer mes yeux . . .

¹³ Robert Merle's Oscar Wilde gives a brilliant analysis of the reasons for the prevalence of Christian and especially Catholic conversions amongst homosexuals.

¹⁴ Mallarme, unpublished letter to Wilde, 1893, Quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁵ Howard Fast, Literature and Reality, N. Y., International Publishers, 1950, p. 11.

¹⁶ Howard Fast, Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁷ Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, N. Y., World Publishing Co., 1968, p. 298.

¹⁸ J. T. Grein, 'On Wilde as Dramatist', in Beckson, op. cit., pp. 235-236.

¹⁹ Arthur Ransome, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁰ Jacques Suffel, op. cit., p. 24.

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